

**A CASE STUDY EXPLORING HOW MIDDLE MANAGERS  
IMPLEMENT DELIBERATE STRATEGY IN A GOVERNMENT  
DEPARTMENT**

**by**

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**submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of**

**MASTER OF COMMERCE**

**In the subject**

**BUSINESS MANAGEMENT**

**at the**

**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**Date: 29 May 2018**

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Exact wording of the title of the dissertation as appearing on the copies submitted for examination:

**A case study exploring how middle managers implement deliberate strategy in a government department**

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I declare that the above dissertation/thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Signature

29 May 2018

Date

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I embarked on the journey of pursuing my Master of Commerce in Business Management degree with the application of my research intent and culminating with the submission of my dissertation. I acknowledge my journey and growth over the past few years and thank my Creator for this opportunity to develop and humble myself through the highs and lows.

There are many heroes and motivators who stood by my side during the studies:

- My mum, who is my light and inspiration and who believed in my strength even when I lost faith in myself.
- My dad and best friend and mentor (Mala Govender) who did not live to see me to get to this point. This includes family members that are not with us now. My family, my bloodline – your kind words of encouragement live forever in my heart.
- My amazing research supervisors for their perseverance and excellence. I see us three as a triangle. You made me strive for excellence. I will forever be grateful for your guidance until eternity. *I am because of you.* Professor Annemarie Davis, thank you for inspiring me to further my post-graduate studies. You have a gift of making students see what they cannot see in themselves. You make them believe that the sky is the limit. May you continue to be the beacon of hope and light for many students who will cross your path in future. This is your gift and contribution to life.
- To Nadine de Metz, thank you for your guidance and mentorship. Your unwavering dedication and kindness have not gone unnoticed. You had to put up with the highs and many of the lows; yet, you encouraged us to see the end goal. You never stopped believing that we could do it. You are a remarkable supervisor.
- To the University of South Africa for the study bursary that enabled the research to take place.
- I pay tribute to my silent knights, the ones who stood in the background of my journey. Magarette van Zyl, the best librarian, for your patience and assistance. To Bettie, thank you for all your support and mentorship. Heather Wilson, for all your assistance and standing by me through my post-graduate studies. To Jackie Viljoen for your remarkable work as my language editor. To the co-coder for the

excellent work that you did. To all my friends, thank you for the steadfast words of support.

To the middle managers, I appreciate that you agreed to be part of the study. Thank you for the remarkable work that each one of you are doing. To the department where the study was carried out, thank you for agreeing to be part of the journey.

## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to explore how the middle manager implements strategy at a South African government department. This study was conducted in response to the call for more research to be done using the strategy-as-practice perspective to explore the involvement of middle managers in a South African government context with regard to strategy. The current study sought to identify the roles that the middle manager undertakes with regard to strategy implementation, inclusive of the barriers that they face on a daily basis. The study aimed at providing feedback on how the middle managers implement strategy, overcome the barriers they face and some changes that participating middle managers proposed to the current practices in strategy implementation in a government context. A single case study, utilising an exploratory qualitative research design, was undertaken at a government department in South Africa. The data was gathered using semi-structured interviews. The researcher used the interviews to provide rich, detailed descriptions of how strategy is implemented by middle managers. The study portrayed the participating middle managers as playing an integral role as interpreters, communicators and implementers of the strategy within the government context. Findings confirmed that most of the middle managers were not involved in the crafting of the high level strategy of the government department. The participating middle manager fulfilled eight key roles in the implementation of the strategy: leadership role, management role, implementation role, monitoring role, reporting role, supporting role, communication role and information-sharing role. The participating middle managers dealt with many barriers with regard to strategy implementation on a daily basis, such as lack of understanding of government work, monitoring, support, skilled personnel, skill development, funding and information. The participating middle managers were found to be innovative and creative in utilising strategy tools to overcome the barriers they faced. Although these results cannot be generalised but may be transferrable to similar contexts.

**Key terms:** middle managers; government department; strategy implementation; strategy; strategising practices; strategy-as-practice perspective; strategy tools; sense-making.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<b>APP</b>	Annual Performance Plan
<b>DG</b>	Director-General
<b>MTSF</b>	Medium-term Strategic Framework
<b>NDP</b>	National Development Plan
<b>SWOT</b>	Strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats

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## DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

This section defines the key concepts that are used in the current research. The words and the definitions are listed below:

- **Barriers** – challenges, constraints, stumbling blocks and problems that impede strategy implementation and change (Jooste & Fourie, 2009:53, 60; Isaac, Victor & Teryima, 2014:66).
- **Deliberate strategy** – connected to activities that are normally linked to the intention of a person of authority and the strategies implemented in a determined way (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985).
- **Electoral cycle** – in the South African context, an electoral cycle is five years and it covers the priorities of the election manifesto of the governing party, including the commitment to implement the National Development Plan (The Presidency, 2014:22).
- **Middle manager** – a mid-level professional working above the lower levels of operational employees in organisations but below top management (O'Shannassy, 2009).
- **Officials** - for the purpose of this research, the term “officials” refer to the employees working at the selected government department.
- **Strategic practitioner** – are strategists who link formulation and implementation, as well as content and deliberate and emergent strategies in an organisation (Jenkins, Ambrosini & Collier, 2016:270).
- **Strategy-as-practice** – considers how people (for example middle managers or professionals) mobilise their tools of practice (skills and roles) in engaging in strategic activity (Rouleau, 2013:548).
- **Strategy implementation** – turns formulated strategy into a series of actions, which build on the mission, strategy and strategic objectives of the organisation (Jooste & Fourie, 2009:52).
- **Strategic management** – emanates from management decisions, processes, and activities, which lead to the strategy being delivered. This is done across

all levels of employees, and it involves actions and activities, which lead to the strategy being implemented (Jenkins, Ambrosini & Collier, 2016:1).

- **Sense-making** – involves a person having to develop a framework, which allows him or her to make sense of his or her experience and an understanding of the reality of the organisation. This means that the person working in an organisation makes sense of new knowledge and events as they arise (Filstad, 2014:5).
- **Sense-giving** – involves a manager trying to influence outcome, to communicate his or her thoughts about the change to others and to gain their support (Rouleau, 2005).
- **Strategising** – the doing of strategy, which occurs when practices, praxis and practitioners interconnect (Jenkins et al., 2016:267).
- **Strategy tools** – available techniques, tools, methods, models, frameworks, approaches and methodologies, which provide for decision-making within strategic management (Clark, 1997: 417).
- **The Medium-term Strategic Framework** – sets out the actions that government will take and targets to be achieved over the current electoral cycle (The Presidency, 2014:22).



# **1. RESEARCH ORIENTATION**

## **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Strategy is a medium used to achieve the priorities and objectives of government. Strategies formulated, however, often do fail at implementation, with the number estimated to be between 50% and 90% by some authors (Candido & Santos, 2015:241–244). This is concerning especially in the government context, as they are entrusted for the provision of essential services such as housing, health and education. This led to the current study to explore how strategy is implemented in a government context because little is known in this respect in South Africa. In order to understand strategy implementation in a government context, it is necessary to focus on the micro-level. The strategy for government is depicted in many high level planning documents. Strategy is not just the property of the organisation, but something that people do (Whittington, 2006:627). In a government context, the implementation of strategy should also focus on the actions of the employees who implement them.

Strategy implementation is an activity carried out, amongst others, by individuals. Giving attention to the human element ensures that government employees are aware of the priorities that have to be achieved in a financial year, and government can be held accountable for the delivery thereof. This human involvement promotes transparency and accountability in government. Strategies are implemented by officials at different levels within the organisation. The senior managers in government are involved in the high level planning of strategy, whereas the middle managers are seen as mostly implementers of strategy. This is in line with the view of Mantere (2008:294) who depicts the middle managers as drivers of strategy. The middle managers make use of sense-making and lived experience in connecting the different strategic practices of the strategy implementation which takes place at middle-up-down management levels (Balogun & Rouleau, 2011:955; Peris-Bonet, Canet-Giner & Lavarda, 2010:361:370).

The current study adopted the strategy-as-practice perspective. The use of the strategy-as-practice perspective is advantageous because it emphasises the doing of strategy by studying the micro-activities and this is then linked to the macro-level of the organisation (Lê, Seidl & Suddaby, 2013:330).

Whilst there have been studies done on strategy implementation, limited studies cover strategy or strategy implementation from a South African perspective in the government environment (Garnett, Bevan-Dye & De Klerk, 2011; Jooste & Fourie, 2009; Palmer, 2003). Given the body of knowledge that confirms the challenge of strategy implementation, it is also noteworthy that the public sector officials are looking towards strategy research for their own strategic direction (Arndt & Galvin, 2014:141). This prompted a study to be carried out from a South African context, using the strategy-as-practice perspective focusing on the middle manager. In the next section the researcher discusses the public sector in South Africa.

## **1.2 THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN SOUTH AFRICA**

In South Africa there are three spheres of government, consisting of national, provincial and local levels of government. In governing the three spheres of government the Constitution is the highest law and no other law or government action can overrule or be in conflict with the Constitution (The Presidency, 2014:22). The national government provides legislative and policy frameworks to enable provincial and local spheres of government to carry out their responsibilities (The Presidency, 2014:22). The provincial and local spheres of government implement the policies and objectives of national government (The Presidency, 2014:22). This is known as concurrent functions.

There are nine provinces in South Africa, which are Eastern Cape, Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Northern Cape, North West and Western Cape (Statistics South Africa [Stats SA], 2017:7). In South Africa, the citizens vote in national and provincial elections in order to choose the political party to govern the country or the province for five years at a time (National Treasury, 2010). The ruling party is then tasked with implementing the policies and plans as they are spelled out in their election manifesto. This is done via a strategic management process at the various government departments which include Housing, Education, Home Affairs and Arts and Culture (National Treasury, 2010).

The country adopted the National Development Plan (NDP) which sets out the priorities to be achieved for the country up until the year 2030 (NPC, 2013). The manner in which the government achieves these priorities is by developing strategies towards achieving its goals. The strategy is implemented by public sector employees.



In the current electoral cycle, which covers the years 2014 to 2019, after the adoption of the NDP, the 2014–2019 Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF) was developed and needs to be implemented to govern the priorities of government for this period (The Presidency, 2014:5). The MTSF sets out the plan, which includes the priorities that are linked to the NDP, to be implemented in the current electoral cycle (DPME, 2014:4). Some of the priorities that government focuses on are economic transformation, rural development, access to human settlements and fighting crime and corruption for the years 2014 to 2019 (DPME, 2014:4). This means that all spheres of government are mandated to ensure that there is policy coherence, alignment and coordination across government plans, as well as alignment with budgeting processes (The Presidency, 2014:5). The MTSF is the strategic plan framework of the current government to guide other planning documents (The Presidency, 2014:4).

The documents that guide the strategic management process are discussed in detail in section 4.4. In terms of government departments, the five year strategic plan sets out the policy priorities, programmes and project plans of the departments for a five-year period as approved by its executive authority, within the scope of available resources (National Treasury, 2010:6). This then leads to the crafting of the Annual Performance Plan (APP) which narrates what is done in a given year by a government department (National Treasury, 2010:7). The APP includes indicators and targets for budget programmes and sub-programmes (National Treasury, 2010). All government departments, whether it is national or provincial, has an APP (National Treasury, 2010).

Taking the above into account, the current study, from a strategy-as-practice perspective sought, to address how the deliberate strategy that is included in all the planning documents is implemented at the education department. This was done in an attempt to make a contribution to how deliberate strategy is implemented in a specific context. The study involves practitioners (those who do the work of strategy), practices (the social, symbolic and material tools through which strategy work is done) and praxis (the flow of activity in which strategy is accomplished) (Salih & Doll, 2013:33). Findings from previous studies indicate that a small percentage of research addressing strategy within the public sector, or even a non-profit context, has been carried out (Arndt & Galvin, 2014:141).

### **1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The priorities and objectives of government need to be implemented by way of a strategy in order to ensure the delivery of essential services in South Africa. One of the most essential practitioners is the middle manager, who is identified as a strategic actor and strategist (Jansen van Rensburg, Davis & Venter, 2014:165). The important roles of the middle managers are to execute the plans of the organisation, and this is related to the policy and objectives of top management (Chilanga, Karodia & Mwanza, 2014:74). The implementation of the government strategy cannot be ignored, as the stakes are too high, taking into account the importance of education and the budget provision for education in the country.

Limited research has been published on how the middle manager implements strategy in a government department from a strategy-as-practice perspective. An extensive search on the specialist subject databases on the University of South Africa library website could not locate any published research on strategising and strategy implementation practices of individual middle managers within the South African government context. Therefore the problems that this study sought to address were:

1. The lack of research on how strategy is crafted and implemented in a government department from a middle-manager perspective;
2. The lack of research on the strategy tools that the middle manager utilises with regard to strategy implementation in a government department; and
3. The lack of research on the barriers that are experienced by the middle managers and how these are overcome in a government department.

### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The central question and sub-questions for the current study are shown below. The aim was to explore how the middle manager implements deliberate strategy in a government department in South Africa.

#### **Central research question**

How do middle managers implement strategy in a government department in South Africa?

### **Sub- research questions**

1. What are the roles and activities that the middle manager undertakes with regard to strategy implementation?
2. What are the tools that the middle manager uses with regard to strategy implementation?
3. How do middle managers deal with barriers that arise during strategy implementation?

### **1.5 PURPOSE STATEMENT**

The aim of the current study was to investigate how strategies are implemented, specifically looking at middle managers in a South African government department. The strategy tools and barriers that they encountered were also explored. The timeframe was mid-way through the current electoral cycle (2014–2019) which is the year 2016. The research set out to add to the body of knowledge by utilising the strategy-as-practice perspective to study the middle manager and strategy implementation in a South African government department.

### **1.6 DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

The current research was a single case study based on a qualitative approach which explored how the middle managers implement strategy in a single government department. The number of the middle managers at the government department is 356 employees. The use of the qualitative design offered the benefit of the middle managers providing meaning and explanations on how deliberate strategy is implemented at their department.

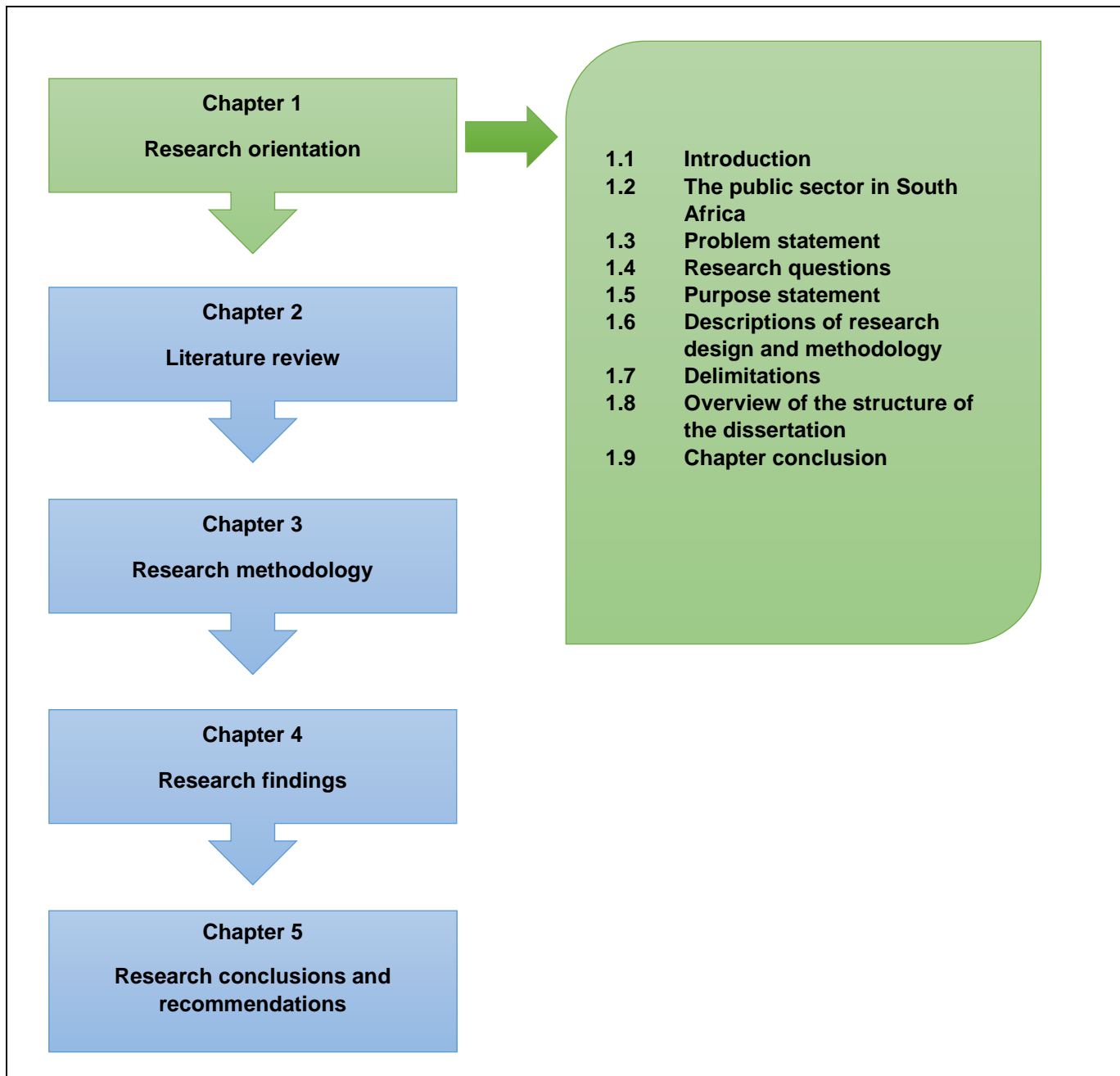
The constructivism-interpretivism paradigm was used as the researcher sought to get detailed responses from the middle managers, which was brought to the surface through deep reflection on the questions being asked (Ponterotto, 2005:129). The researcher chose the participants by the use of purposive sampling. The data was gathered through interviews utilising semi-structured interviews which were voice recorded. The researcher was able to collect rich data as was prescribed by Gillham (2008:65) in view of the fact that this was a single-based case study. Data was analysed through thematic analysis. The steps to reach the themes, categories and sub-categories were as prescribed by Flick (2014a:422) and Saldaña (2009:3).

## **1.7 DELIMITATIONS**

The participants in the current study are those limited to middle managers appointed at levels 11 and 12 in the selected government department. The current study focused on the middle manager which is in line with the middle management perspective. This excluded staff at the other levels employed at the government department. Only middle managers employed in the selected government department were interviewed and this does not include those occupying the same level at state-owned enterprises, non-profit organisations and private-sector organisations. Lastly, the current study was carried out during the electoral cycle in South Africa which covers 2014 to 2019. The years of the study were specifically 2016 and 2017.

## **1.8 OVERVIEW OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION**

Below is an overview of the chapters included in the dissertation. Figure 1 below depicts the structure of this dissertation and the sections discussed thus far.



**Figure 1: Structure of Chapter 1**

**Source: Author**

In Chapter 1 the researcher provided the background to the study, the problem statement, the central research question and sub-questions and the purpose statement. The researcher further provides the delimitations of the study.

In Chapter 2 the researcher provides the literature review for this dissertation. Chapter 2 begins with the review of the strategy-as-practice perspective which provides for a development of the perspective, the framework and typology. A discussion of strategic management follows. In the next section that follows the researcher discusses

strategic management with emphasis on strategy implementation (enablers and barriers). The literature provides for a description of strategising, deliberate and emergent strategy. The strategy tools that are used in strategy implementation are discussed. The researcher offers a detailed review of research involving the middle managers, especially the roles they undertake, with regard to strategy. In this chapter the researcher concludes with a discussion of the sense-making and sense-giving of the middle manager with regard to strategy.

In Chapter 3, the researcher provides the context of the study including the research design and methodology that the researcher employed in the current study. The researcher describes the selection of the participants, the data production method, data analysis process and the limitations and strengths of the research design.

In Chapter 4, the researcher offers the findings of the current study which provides for rich descriptions which are substantiated by verbatim quotes. The researcher discusses the middle managers' involvement in the crafting of the strategy at the government department. The roles that they undertake including the barriers and enablers of strategy implementation are discussed. The researcher concludes with how the middle managers overcome the barriers that arise and give possible suggestions to change the current strategic practices within the government department.

In Chapter 5, the researcher interprets the findings and links it back to the theory. A discussion of how the central research question and sub-questions were dealt with is included in this chapter. This researcher concludes with the limitations of the study and makes recommendations for future research.

## **1.9 CHAPTER CONCLUSION**

The purpose of this chapter was to provide the research orientation with the first section covering the introduction and the background of the current study. The researcher discussed the problem statement, purpose and research questions. The delimitations of the current study were depicted in detail. The researcher put forward the main argument that there is a lack of research on how strategy is crafted and implemented in a government department from a middle-manager perspective. This includes the fact that not much is known about the strategy tools and how the barriers that are experienced by the middle managers are overcome in a government

department. This researcher explained that the strategising practices of the middle manager are open for exploration at a government department utilising the strategy-as-practice perspective.

In the next chapter, the researcher offers a review of the literature by exploring the current body of knowledge on strategy-as-practice, strategic management and strategic implementation. The middle managers, their roles and activities that are undertaken with regard to strategy implementation are also given attention. The barriers experienced in the private and public services are also discussed in detail.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

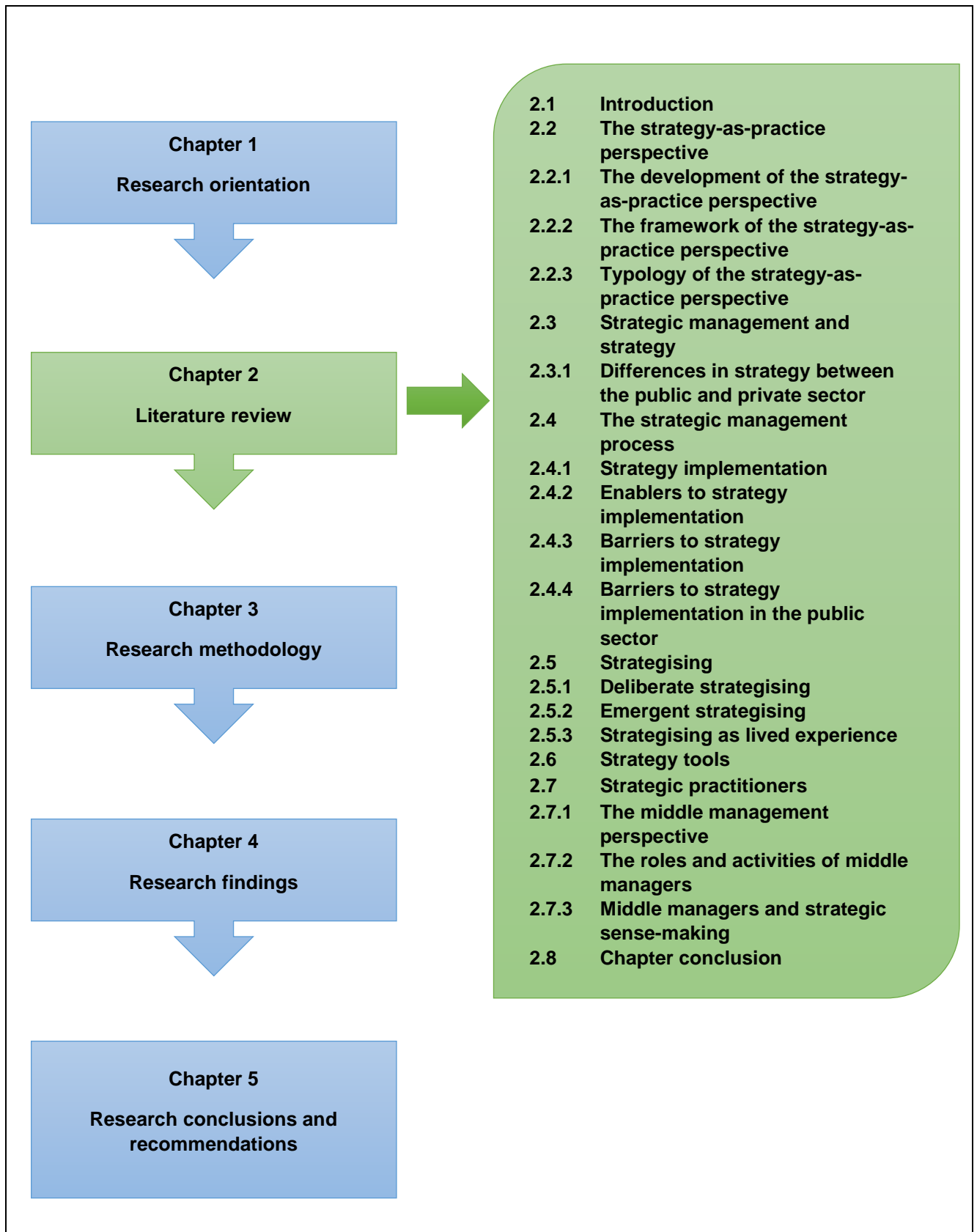
### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter 1 the researcher introduced the purpose of the current research, which is to explore how middle managers implement the deliberate strategy in a single governmental department. The purpose of Chapter 2 is to provide a theoretical basis and review of the concepts that are relevant to the current study. As stated in Chapter 1, the current study adopts the strategy-as-practice perspective to explore how deliberate strategy is implemented in a government department.

In Chapter 2 the researcher starts with a discussion of the development of the strategy-as-practice perspective, followed by a review of the strategy-as-practice framework and typology. The strategic management process is discussed with emphasis on strategy implementation. The barriers as well as the enablers associated with strategy implementation in both profit-oriented and public sector organisations are discussed. The current study explored how deliberate strategy is implemented by middle managers, which means that the concepts of strategising, deliberate and emergent strategising needed to be reviewed in order to gauge how strategy is crafted, followed by a discussion highlighting the strategy tools used in strategy.

The researcher ends the chapter with a discussion of the roles that the middle managers undertake, as well as their strategic sense-making in an organisation. The layout of the literature review in the context of the whole dissertation is shown in Figure 2 below.





**Figure 2: Structure of Chapter 2**

**Source: Author**

Figure 2 provides an overview of the literature review section. The sections cover the different features that are linked to the research sub-questions. The sub-questions investigate the roles, strategy tools and barriers that the middle manager experiences with regard to strategy implementation from a strategy-as-practice perspective. In the next section, the researcher discusses the strategy-as-practice perspective.

## **2.2 THE STRATEGY-AS-PRACTICE PERSPECTIVE**

In this section, the researcher first discusses the practice turn to researching strategy. The practice turn called for more research to focus on the micro-level activity, which is a move from the general and abstract reflection to a targeted analysis (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl & Vaara, 2015:1). The practice turn seeks to examine how the behaviour or actions of managers are linked to the prevailing practice (Golsorkhi et al., 2015:1). Therefore, in order to study strategy implementation, it is necessary to focus on the micro-level in order to investigate the nitty-gritty activities that involve strategy work (Whittington, 1996:732). In the sections that follow the researcher traces the development and the framework of the strategy-as-practice perspective. The goal is to show why the strategy-as-practice perspective permitted the researcher to explore the strategy process at a government department.

### **2.2.1 The development of the strategy-as-practice perspective**

In order to explore strategy at the micro-level, the current study was done using the strategy-as-practice perspective. Strategy-as-practice emerged during the early 2000s. After the second European Institute for the Advanced Studies in Management conference during 2002 a special issue of micro-strategising basically re-introduced the micro-actions of human actors and how it shapes the strategic outcome of the organisation (Johnson, Melin & Whittington, 2003:3). The benefits are that the link between the macro and micro can be explained, and furthermore the day-to-day activities can be studied in order to gauge how it affects the macro-decisions of the organisation (Johnson et al., 2003:15).

The strategy-as-practice perspective was developed from various sources, which involved strategy process and strategic management according to Golsorkhi et al. (2015:3). The researchers who originally contributed to the strategy-as-practice perspective are Pettigrew, Mintzberg, Waters, Oakes, Knight, Morgan, Johnson, Huff, Townley and Cooper (Golsorkhi et al., 2015:3). However, Whittington was the first

researcher in 1996 to locate strategy-as-practice in relation to other fields of strategy (Golsorkhi et al., 2015:3).

Whittington (1996:731) outlines four basic perspectives of strategy during the twentieth century. The first perspective was the planning approach, which concentrated on tools and techniques that allowed managers to make decisions about business direction (Whittington, 1996:731). This occurred during the 1960s (Whittington, 1996:731). The planning approach was seen as the first function of management and was an essential perspective, because managers previously used to react only when barriers arose (Karger & Malik, 1975:60).

The second perspective occurred during the 1970s, which was the policy perspective (Whittington, 1996:731). This perspective focused on the organisation pursuing a new strategic direction and concentrated on elements such as innovation, joint ventures and acquisition (Whittington, 1996:731).

The third perspective was the process approach, which occurred during the 1980s (Whittington, 1996:731). The process approach focused on how organisations predicted the need for strategic change and how this was attained (Whittington, 1996:732). The strategy process highlights how the strategy emerges (Chia & MacKay, 2007:220). However, while the strategy process approach made significant departures from the content-based theories of strategy by introducing a dynamic view of strategy, this approach focused on studying the process across many levels. The process approach further concentrated on understanding the sequence of events over time and the study of the process is linked to the outcome (Pettigrew, 1992:9–11). In addition, the process approach mainly focused on the whole organisation rather than the individual and not much was understood about the micro-level activity which leads to the strategy-as-practice perspective (Chia & MacKay, 2007:220).

The gaps of the process approach led to the fourth perspective, which is the strategy-as-practice perspective. The perspective originated during the 1990s and it had its origins in the process approach and sociological theories of practice (Vaara & Whittington, 2012:290; Whittington, 1996:732). Further, the perspective deals with outcomes and entails exploration beyond profit seeking and more emphasis is on qualitative studies (Vaara & Whittington, 2012:290–293). In addition, the strategy-as-practice perspective has gained stature because it focuses on the practitioners and

the activities that they are engaged in as a basis for a better understanding of strategising (Antonacopoulou & Macpherson, 2013:266). The strategy-as-practice perspective focuses on how managers and consultants interact in the strategy making process and organisations to achieve their objectives (Cardoso & Lavarda, 2011:14; Whittington, 1996:732). This approach covers the creation of the ideas, opportunities and situations, which are linked to the lowest activities connected to the strategy process (Whittington, 1996:732).

Vaara and Whittington (2012:313) highlight that, with the changes that have taken place in technology, the economy and social context, strategy needed to be studied in order for it to be fully understood in the twenty-first century. Research using the strategy-as-practice perspective has over the years appeared in many journals, for example, Human Relations, Organizational Studies, Journal of Management Studies and Academy of Management Journal (Blom & Alvesson, 2015:407). Since the twenty-first century, the strategy-as-practice perspective is used to study strategic management, strategy making and strategy work. The study allows for in-depth studies of strategy formulation, planning and implementation (Golsorkhi et al., 2015:1–2). The strategy-as-practice perspective allows the researcher to study the behaviour and actions of the managers (Golsorkhi et al., 2015:3).

In the current study, the strategy-as-practice perspective was used to examine the strategy process in a government department. However, it is noted that there are overlaps between the process approach and the strategy-as-practice perspective on researching strategy. The two perspectives are similar in that the strategy can be studied across the different levels of the department. The strategy-as-practice perspective focuses on the practitioner at a unit level rather than holistically as shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: The process and strategy-as-practice approach into researching strategy**

Process approach	Strategy-as-practice approach
Processes must be studied across the different levels in the organisation	Strategy-as-practice perspective is a wider engagement by strategic management discipline with social science as a whole
Processes are viewed as temporarily connected to past, present and future	The strategy-as-practice perspective focuses on strategising episodes, or the effects of strategy tools, or the involvement of particular types of practitioner
The process approach studies where the contexts and actions of strategy taken place as a result of interacting with one another	The scope of the research of strategy has moved beyond the profit-seeking scope of the research of strategy
The process approach can generate new knowledge not only of the process but also how outcomes are shaped	The study of strategy has moved away from the conventional quantitative research methodology of strategy to an emphasis on qualitative research methodology.
The explanations that are given must be holistic.	The aim is to get as close to the unit of study (participant) as possible.

**Source: Pettigrew (1992:9); Vaara and Whittington (2012:290–291)**

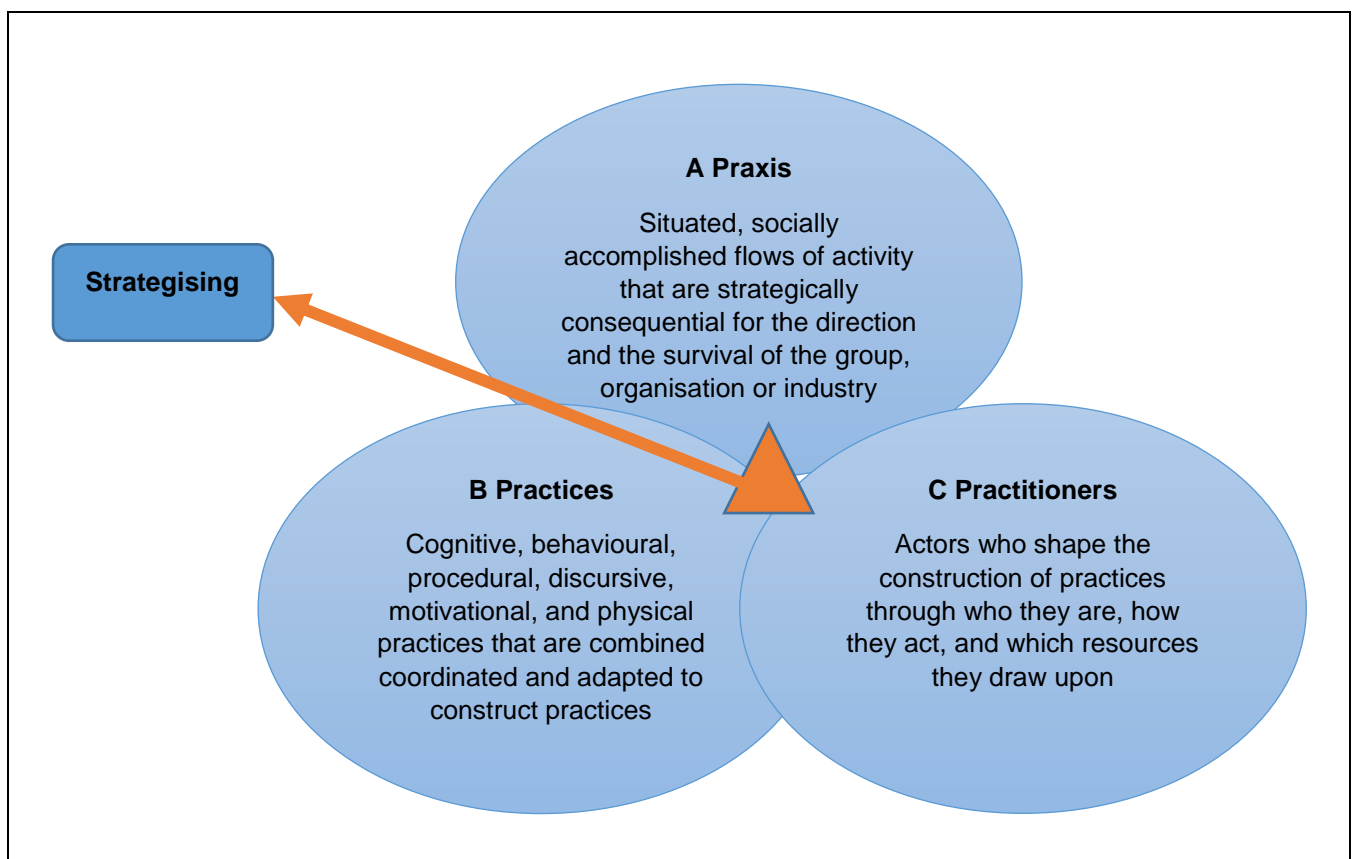
In Table 1, the researcher provides reasons why the researcher departed from the strategy process approach to study the micro-activities of the participants at the government department. The researcher also shows the contrasts between the two approaches in which the strategy-as-practice perspective highlights the studying of the practitioner with the use of qualitative research design and the focus moving away from profit seeking organisations. The strategy-as-practice perspective further focuses on the strategy tools of the unit of analysis. Studying strategy through the strategy-as-practice perspective suggests that first, the activities that impact on strategy must be identified, and secondly, the person performing these activities must be studied (Floyd & Sputtek, 2011:21). In addition, the strategy-as-practice perspective involves storytelling and narrative, which permits a sophisticated understanding of strategising of strategists (Brown & Thompson, 2013:1152). The study of the process approach of strategy is important because the emphasis is on the participant. While the process approaches generated new knowledge about how outcomes are shaped, the strategy-

as-practice perspective gauges how this is done by the practitioner, thus drilling deeper into the micro-practices.

In the next two sections, the researcher builds on the development of the strategy-as-practice perspective and why it was seen as applicable for interrogation of the strategy implementation from the middle manager's perspective within a single government department.

### 2.2.2 The framework of the strategy-as-practice perspective

The main focus of the discussion in this section is the strategy-as-practice perspective. The key framework for conducting the current study in this approach is the interrelationship between praxis, practices and practitioners. In Figure 3 below the researcher depicts the elements of the strategy-as-practice perspective.



**Figure 3: A conceptual framework for analysing strategy-as-practice**

**Source: Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl (2007:5)**

In the current study, the researcher focuses on praxis, practices and practitioners, which aligns to the strategy-as-practice perspective, in order to explore how strategy

is implemented by middle managers in a government department. In terms of Figure 3 praxis is the work that encompasses strategy and is seen as all the work done inside the organisation which involves the crafting of the strategy and getting it executed (Whittington, 2006:628). In addition, Clarke and Hodgkinson (2007:247) list formal board meetings, strategy workshops and informal conversations as being part of praxis. This includes meeting, talking, calculating, form-filling and presenting that in which strategy is constituted (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008:282). Praxis also refers to the stream of activities which leads to the strategy being accomplished over time (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009:73). The strategy can be achieved according to Vaara and Whittington (2012:303) by utilising the praxis of resource-based view, observing the work of staff, everyday informal interactions between middle managers, gossiping and rumours. This praxis can shape strategic change as noted by Vaara and Whittington (2012:303). Jansson (2013:1010) agrees that human interventions can change implementation practices.

Reckwitz (2002:252) defines practices as routine behaviour covering various forms of bodily activities, mental activities and background knowledge which interconnect. Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009:8) support this view by stating that practices focus on the body, emotions and motivations for strategy, as these practices are not easily understood. Practices are the social, symbolic and material tools through which strategy is done (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008:282). These include spreadsheets, budget systems and technology (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008:282). Vaara and Whittington (2012:290–297) add on to the practices for strategy work to include Porter's five forces: strategic workshops, artefacts, accounting practices in strategy, interactive visual methods in strategic planning, management accounting system and strengths, weakness, opportunities and threat (SWOT) analysis.

Practitioners are the people who are involved in doing work that comprises strategy (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008:282). This implies that practitioners are therefore senior managers, managers at different levels of an organisation and external people such as consultants, regulators and analysts (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008:282). Whilst the practitioners focus on the micro-praxis, they still pay attention to the macro-level praxis, which can be linked to society (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009:73). The practitioners are discussed further in section 2.7 of this chapter. At the centre of the

three elements is strategising, which is depicted in Figure 3 above and is discussed further in section 2.5 of this chapter.

In the section that follows, the researcher identifies the typology that was used for the current study that was carried out utilising the elements of the strategy-as-practice perspective.

### **2.2.3 Typology of the strategy-as-practice perspective**

Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009:73) developed a typology of nine domains of strategy-as-practice research, representing possible areas of strategy-as-practice research. This typology has been widely used by strategy-as-practice researchers to identify and position strategy-as-practice research (Stander & Pretorius, 2016). Stander and Pretorius (2016:8) constructed a comparative typology matrix, providing a more updated version of Jarzabkowski and Spee's (2009:74) original strategy-as-practice typology matrix. The update done by Stander and Pretorius (2016:8) and the original typology of research by Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009:74) are depicted in Figure 4 below. The studies identified in the typology cover the internal practitioners (internal individual and aggregate practitioners) and the external practitioners (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009:73). The three levels of the praxis are micro, meso and macro as shown below. The use of the strategy-as-practice perspective to study strategy focuses at the micro-level (which covers an individual or group experience), the meso-level (which is the experience at organisational level), and the macro-level (which can be seen as the institutional or industry level) (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009).

Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009:73) and Stander and Pretorius (2016:8) further classify the research that was already done using the strategy-as-practice perspective into the domains as seen in Figure 4 below. This does not mean that all future research would fit in these parameters. The researcher of the current study combined the typology developed by four researchers to show the studies that have been done over a specified period and the gaps that occur, highlighting future research needs.



Level of praxis		Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009:74)	Stander and Pretorius (2016:8)	Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009:74)	Stander and Pretorius (2016:8)	Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009:74)	Stander and Pretorius (2016:8)
	Macro	C n Empirical = 1 n Theoretical = 0	C n Empirical = 0 n Theoretical = 0	F n Empirical = 1 n Theoretical = 2	F n Empirical = 1 n Theoretical = 0	I n Empirical = 1 n Theoretical = 8	I n Empirical = 2 n Theoretical = 1
	Meso	B n Empirical = 3 n Theoretical = 0	B n Empirical = 3 n Theoretical = 0	E n Empirical = 16 n Theoretical = 0	E n Empirical = 7 n Theoretical = 1	H n Empirical = 1 n Theoretical = 0	H n Empirical = 0 n Theoretical = 0
	Micro	A n Empirical = 6 n Theoretical = 1	A n Empirical = 2 n Theoretical = 1	D n Empirical = 6 n Theoretical = 0	D n Empirical = 56 n Theoretical = 3	G n Empirical = 0 n Theoretical = 0	G n Empirical = 0 n Theoretical = 2
		Individual actor within the organisation			Aggregate actor within the organisation		Extra-organisational aggregate actor
Type of practitioner							

**Figure 4: Typology of strategy-as-practice research by type of practitioner and level of praxis between 2000 and 2015**

Source: Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009:74); Stander and Pretorius (2016:8)

The strategy-as-practice perspective original domains cover the study between 2002 and 2008 in the case of Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009:74–98), which covers empirical and theoretical studies that explicitly identify with the strategy-as-practice research agenda. At the time of their analysis, according to Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009:74), the majority of studies have been done on strategy-as-practice in Domains A, D and E. In the study by Stander and Pretorius (2016:7), between the years 2009 and 2015, most of the studies which utilised the strategy-as-practice perspective to study strategy focus on groups of actors within the organisation and the micro-level praxis, which include Domains D and F. The studies that were done on Domains A and B were less than 10% during the years 2009 and 2015 (Stander & Pretorius, 2016:7). The researchers argue that individuals should be studied to find out how their experiences impact on the macro-activity (Stander & Pretorius, 2016:9). According to Stander and Pretorius (2016:7), more studies need to be done on the macro-praxis and meso-praxis. In response to this, from a strategy-as-practice perspective, the current study thus focused on Domain A (individual practitioners and micro-praxis) and Domain B (individual actors and meso-praxis), focusing on individual actors and how they shape the strategy of the organisation. Domain A covers studies that have examined the individual practitioner, the micro-level praxis, and how practitioners perceive their strategy roles (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009:73–76). Domain B covers studies that have examined the individual actors and what they do that shapes the strategy of the organisation and/or the fact that their actions are shaped by the organisational praxis (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009:73–76).

The current study explores how the middle manager's actions shape the strategy of the department. The study gauges how the action of the middle managers links to the praxis of the organisation, which is the work that encompasses strategy. In addition, the focus is on the individual experiences of the group of middle managers that shape the organisation. The use of the elements of the practitioner, praxis and practices allows the researcher to gauge the roles and activities that the middle manager undertakes with regard to strategy implementation. In addition, employing the strategy-as-practice perspective allows the researcher to identify the strategy tools and the enablers that they use in implementing the strategy.

In the section that follows, the researcher discusses strategic management and strategy. The current study focused on strategy implementation, which is a phase in the strategic management process.

### **2.3 STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGY**

In this section, the origin of strategic management and the importance thereof are discussed. The concept of strategy is also discussed as it is closely linked to strategic management. Strategic management is still considered a fairly new field and was relabelled from the term 'business policy' in 1979 by Schendel and Hofer (cited in by Nag, Hambrick and Chen, 2007:935). Nag et al. (2007:936) explain that the initial proposal to change the name of the business policy to 'strategic management' may have been made by Schendel and Hatten in an unpublished article in 1972. Schendel and Hofer (1979) define strategic management as a process that deals with the entrepreneurial work, renewal, growth, development and the utilisation of the strategy within the organisation which guides its operations. During the 1980s, the research into strategic management covered Porter's book which looked at competitive strategy, business level strategy which focused the effect of environment on strategy, strategic choice and effects of strategy on performance (Hitt & Gimeno & Hoskisson, 1998:9). There was emphasis also on the resource-based view in which an organisation builds on their competitive advantage from the resources that they use (Macintosh & Maclean, 2015:19). According to Pettigrew (1992:9), strategic management involves a series of processes and activities that occur at a multilevel.

There are many schools of thought on strategic management, and the definition of strategic management has evolved since the original definition. In this section, the researcher traces some of the definitions of strategic management during the twenty-first century. The aim is to show how the definition of strategic management has evolved over time. Strategic management is defined by Nag et al. (2007:942) as intended and emergent initiatives that involve the use of resources for the improvement of the performance of the organisation. However, it was Mintzberg and Waters (1985:258) who were amongst the first to distinguish between deliberate and emergent strategy. This will be discussed in sections 2.5.1 and 2.5.2. The words linked to strategic management are strategy, innovation, acquisition, operation, learning and entry (Nag et al., 2007:942). Thompson and Martin (2010:11) arrive at a similar conclusion, and refer to strategic management as a set of decisions and activities

which lead to the formulation, planning and implementation of the vision, mission, strategy and strategic objectives of an organisation. The definition by Thompson and Martin shows the transition in terms of formulation, planning and implementation. In addition, the success of strategic management depends on the culture of the organisation, the strategic leader providing direction, information sharing, monitoring and control systems (Thompson & Martin, 2010:11). Amason (2011:7) continues to point out that strategic management is used for short- and long-term planning across all levels of employees that work in an organisation. Strategic management allows for the emergence of patterns of actions which permit the organisation to become successful (Amason, 2011:8). Jenkins, Ambrosini and Collier (2016:1) state that strategic management emanates from management decisions, processes and activities, which lead to the strategy being delivered. It is noted that the definitions of strategic management point out that it is done across all levels of employees and it involves actions and activities which lead to the strategy being implemented. The definition of strategic management that was deemed appropriate for the current study was by Jenkins et al. (2016:1) because strategic decisions taken by management are implemented by lower level staff.

During the strategic management phases the strategy of an organisation is drawn up (Thompson & Martin, 2010:11). Thompson and Martin (2010:11) see strategy as a key concept in strategic management. This is in view of the fact that strategic management is management actions taken in order to achieve the strategy (White, 2004:56). The term 'strategy' was originally derived from the Greek word *strategos* and it was essentially a plan to win the war (Shimizu, 2012:2). The principles of military strategy can be traced back to 500 BCE (Jenkins et al., 2016:1). Strategies had to be developed in order to understand the strengths and the weaknesses of the opponent, in which the outcome is to outsmart one's opponent (Shimizu, 2012:2). Similarly, in the field of business it is argued that every organisation and individual should have a defined set of goals and purposes which moves them to a deliberate outcome (Sloan, 2014:10). Hay and Williamson (1997:653) claim that the good qualities of strategy are that it is inspirational and that officials see it as the link between their work and that of other ranking officials in the company. Thompson and Martin (2010:9) build on the explanation of strategy hypothesising that it is the actions and activities of managers and the organisation which are used to achieve designated purposes. However, Mintzberg (1987:8) introduces the view that strategy cannot be created without taking

in consideration what happens on the daily basis in running an organisation, for this is the reason that has led to failure of the business and public policy.

Amason (2011:9) as well as Güney and Taylor (2014:327) point out that the significant outcome of strategy is action. Building on this view, strategy can be studied by focusing on strategic plans and texts which link to the micro-practices and macro-realities of an organisation (Amason, 2011:9; Güney & Taylor, 2014:327). For the purpose of the current study, the definition of strategy by Thompson and Martin was most appropriate, because the roles and activities that the middle manager undertakes with regard to strategy implementation will be explored and this can be likened to actions and activities as they appear in the definition. In conclusion, the strategy-as-practice perspective has explored strategy as being a socially accomplished activity (Balogun, Jacobs, Jarzabkowski, Mantere & Vaara, 2014:176). In the next section the researcher discusses the differences between strategy in the public and private sector.

### **2.3.1 Differences between strategy in the public and private sector**

In section 2.3 strategic management and strategy were discussed in detail. In addition, section 1.2 introduces the reader to strategy within the public sector in the South African context. This section builds on that discussion by depicting the differences in strategy in the public and private sector.

There are a number of key difference between strategy within the public sector and strategy within the private sector. Firstly, within the public sector, strategy focuses on a desire to find solutions to societies problems. Thus, the public sector strategy concentrates on improving performance and the emphasis is on the delivery of essential basic services of a country for example the provision of education, housing and home affairs (Veldman & Szabo, 2015:10; The Presidency, 2014:5; Johnsen, 2015:245). Although the strategy of the private sector also focuses on improving performance, the emphasis centres on the outdoing of rivalry and competitors in markets in order to ensure the survival of the organisation (Veldman & Szabo, 2015:10; The Presidency, 2014:5; Johnsen, 2015:245). The focus, within the private sector is therefore on an organisation looking for competitive advantage in insecure markets (Veldman & Szabo, 2015:10; The Presidency, 2014:5; Johnsen, 2015:245).

A further distinction of strategy within the public sector is that the spending of funds is on service delivery, which is in contrast to the private sector which essentially deals with generating profit (Veldman & Szabo, 2015:10; The Presidency, 2014:5; Johnsen,

2015:245). The strategy of the private sector has to ensure that it achieves an acceptable return on investment, as a result, the strategy within the private sector is mainly geared to make strategic changes to the organisation so that profit can be generated (Marin, 2012:116; Veldman & Szabo, 2015:10). However, within the public sector, each government organisation needs to know what makes them important in society and what type of value they can generate for the broader society (Veldman & Szabo, 2015:10).

Generally, both the public sector and the private sector have similar strategic elements such as strategic intent, purpose drive and the attention on encouraging staff to achieve the strategy (Alford & Greve, 2017:4). However, the strategies of government are regulated which requires a formal strategic plan that is linked to specific goals, values, performance measures and to a budget (Johnsen, 2015:257). Lastly, the strategy of the public sector is inspired by political choice which is motivated by democracy and law, whilst in the private sector the strategy is influenced by fluctuations in the market and circumstances (Veldman & Szabo, 2015:10).

In section 2.4.3 and 2.4.4 the barriers of strategy implementation is discussed in detail, and the differences between the public and private sector with reference to the barriers of strategy implementation are discussed under these two sections.

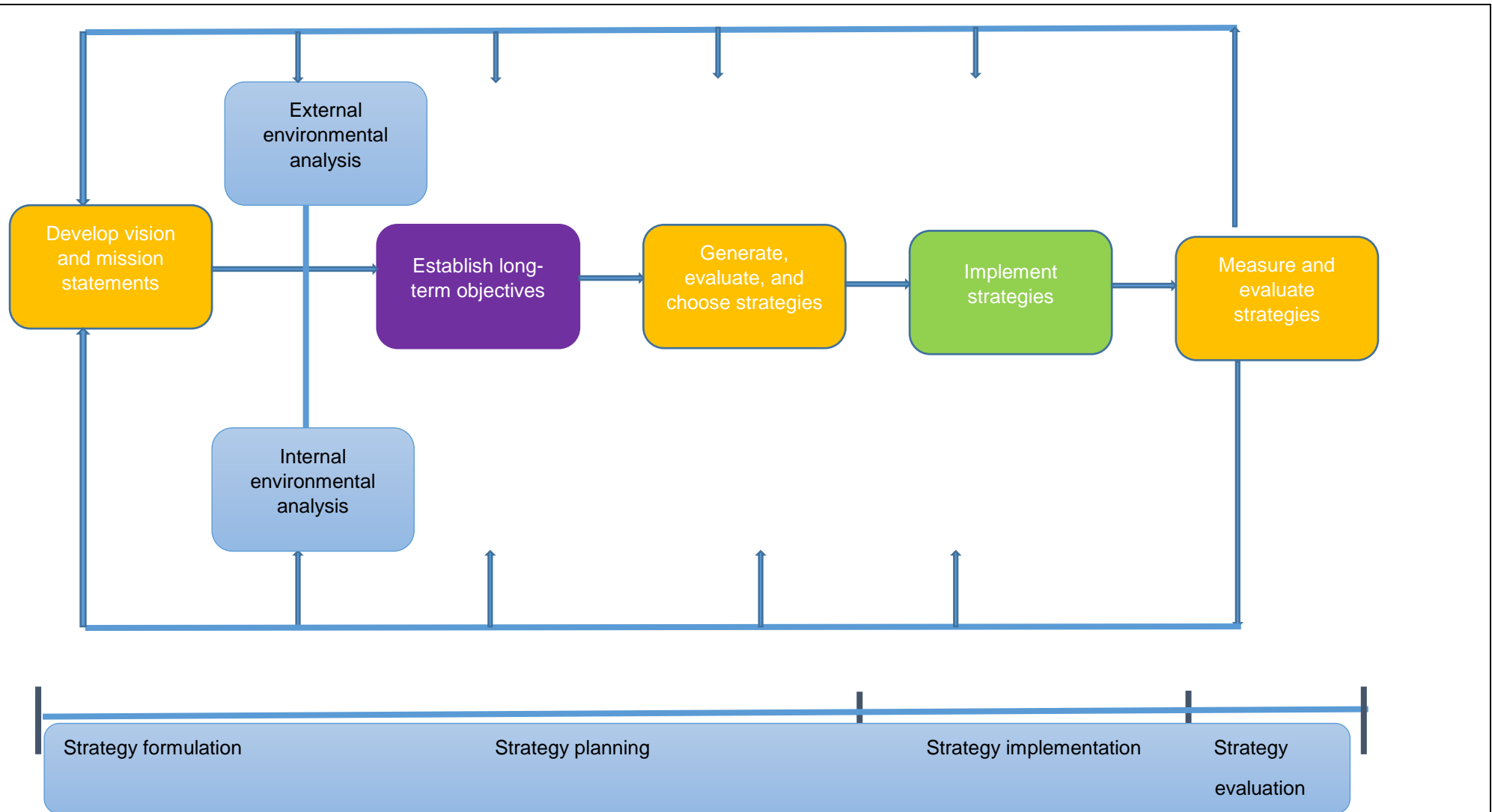
The next section discusses the strategic management process.

## **2.4 THE STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PROCESS**

Strategic management was defined by Jenkins et al. (2016:1) as emanating from management decisions, processes and activities, which lead to the strategy being implemented. This definition was also used for the purposes of the current study. This section builds on section 2.3 by discussing the different phases of the strategic management process. The phases of strategic management are discussed because there is a need to understand how strategy is crafted, implemented and evaluated. However, the emphasis of the current study explored strategy implementation by the middle manager at a government department.

There are a number of different models of the process that have been developed through the years. The phases of the strategic management process that have been widely prescribed are strategy formulation, strategy implementation and strategy evaluation, as depicted by David (2009:46). The model of the strategic management

process is depicted in Figure 5 below. The researcher chose this model for the study because it shows the steps of strategic management, from the conception of the development of the mission and vision statements, which is part of strategy formulation, until the strategy evaluation phase, as shown in Figure 5 below.



**Figure 5: Model of strategic management process**

Source: Adapted from David (2009:46); Thompson and Martin (2010:367)



The phases appearing in Figure 5 above are all linked and the assumption is that if anything goes wrong in one of the steps, it can derail the process and prevent it from succeeding (David, 2009:46).

The first phase of the strategic management process is strategy formulation. This phase involves the process of drawing up the strategy and it covers the strengths and the weaknesses of the company in relation to the threats and opportunities of the environment (Szulanski & Amin, 2001:539). In addition, Elbanna and Fadol (2016:75–89) elaborate that implementation of the strategic plan is influenced by the strategic formulation process, which covers formulation mode, participation and political behaviour. Further strategy formulation allows for the effective management of threats and opportunities that may arise (Aswathappa & Reddy, 2010:15). As depicted in Figure 5 above, the threats and opportunities are identified by internal and external environmental analysis. The external factors that affect an organisation can be political and legal, economic, technological, socio-cultural and societal factors, or they can be internal environmental factors such as structure, culture and resources (Aswathappa & Reddy, 2010:15).

The second phase in the strategic management process is strategy planning. It is noted that the explanation of strategic planning and formulation is similar; therefore, strategic planning has been added to Figure 5 (Aswathappa & Reddy, 2010:15; Thompson & Martin, 2010:367). Strategy planning is used to identify where an organisation wants to go and where it can really go (Thompson & Martin, 2010:367). It is envisaged that this phase would also draw from the threats and opportunities that have been identified in the strategy formulation stage. In addition, strategy planning precedes strategy implementation, because planning should precede action, and resource allocation should be done with thought and purpose (Amason, 2011:196). The value of strategic planning is that it increases the awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation. It also helps to ensure the effective allocation of resources and it helps managers to establish priorities and attend to problems (Thompson & Martin, 2010:364–365).

The third phase in the strategic management process is strategy implementation, which turns formulated strategy into a series of actions which build on the mission, strategy and strategic objectives of the organisation (Jooste & Fourie, 2009:52). The resources that are needed for strategy implementation are money, machines, material, time, land

and buildings, organisation structure, culture and control system (Aswathappa & Reddy, 2010:15). Strategy implementation is the focus of this study and is discussed further in sections 2.4.1 to 2.4.4.

The fourth phase in the strategic management process is strategy evaluation as shown in Figure 5 above. Strategy evaluation assists with comparing actual results versus predetermined objectives and targets (Aswathappa & Reddy, 2010:15). Strategy evaluation and control assist in identifying the problems with regard to strategy implementation (Aswathappa & Reddy, 2010:15). Some of the questions that are asked during strategy evaluation are whether the strategy is appropriate, achievable, astute and sustainable (Macintosh & Maclean, 2015:97–98).

In earlier studies the focus was mostly on strategy formulation. However, nowadays the scope of the focus has shifted to strategy implementation (Anvari, Dastjerdi, Kalali & Pourezzat, 2011:9831; Jooste & Fourie 2009:64). According to White (2004:616), if problems affect strategy formulation, it will affect strategy implementation. In a study by Jooste and Fourie (2009:64) the researchers indicate that, in the South African context, strategy implementation is perceived to be more difficult than strategy formulation. This is due to the fact the strategy is not understood, strategy is not communicated and there are not enough skilled officials to implement the strategy (Jooste & Fourie, 2009:64). In the study by Isaac, Victor and Teryima (2014:81) some of the problems with strategy implementation are that leadership is not adequate, implementation of activities are not effective, inadequate training, and there are competing activities that prevented strategy implementation. The current study specifically focused on strategy implementation and explored how deliberate strategy was implemented in a single government department in South Africa. In the next section the researcher discusses strategy implementation in more detail.

#### **2.4.1 Strategy implementation**

Strategy implementation is a roadmap and an implementation plan with targets to be reached in the coming years of an organisation (Darkow, 2015:14). The tasks that are undertaken during strategy implementation are resource allocation, people, budgets, communication, key processes and incentives to ensure effectiveness (Macintosh & Maclean, 2015:131). All these activities are done across the different sections of a company and deal with the management of people and business processes (Smith &

Mandela, 2011:4:6). As such, the operations of the organisation are geared for the accomplishment of the strategy (Isaac et al., 2014:7).

Strategy implementation happens vertically or horizontally. When strategy occurs vertically, top management takes the decisions. The decisions are then implemented by lower level staff (Sting & Loch, 2016:15). Furthermore, when decisions about strategy are taken by lower level staff and filtered up to top management, is seen as vertical strategy implementation (Sting & Loch, 2016:1177–1193). However, when officials on the same rank make decisions with regard to strategy implementation, strategy making is then referred to as horizontal strategy implementation (Sting & Loch, 2016:1177–1193).

The implementation of strategy vertically or horizontally sets in place a process for policies and strategies to be discussed with the staff in an organisation (Chilanga et al., 2014:74). In addition, officials must make use of best practices and have policies and procedures in place for strategy implementation (Smith & Mandela, 2011:8). According to Isaac et al. (2014:70) employees should take cognisance of the fact that a strategy can fail if there is not effective strategy implementation. The way to deal with this is that there should be feedback on strategic changes in strategic implementation which involve fundamental changes in organisational structures, culture and processes (Isaac et al., 2014:67). The feedback links to strategy evaluation and control because problems are identified (Aswathappa & Reddy, 2010:15).

In the section that follows the researcher discusses the enablers and the barriers that are experienced in the private and public service with regard to strategy implementation.

#### **2.4.2 Enablers to strategy implementation**

The aim of the researcher in this section was to identify the factors that lead to successful strategy implementation as identified in the literature review. The lack of an enabler, or inefficient use of an enabler, could easily become a barrier to strategy implementation; and therefore it should be noted that some of the factors discussed in this section can be both an enabler or a barrier to strategy implementation.

There are various enablers of strategy implementation, as identified by Aswathappa and Reddy (2010:202), which promote the activity of strategy. At the organisational level there must be an organisational structure and the corporate culture should fit the strategy (Aswathappa & Reddy, 2010:202). The enablers discussed in this paragraph

promote shared values, ethics, supportive and conducive work environment, which leads to high performance output (Aswathappa & Reddy, 2010:202). The allocation of clear responsibility and progress on the achievement of the strategy leads to successful strategy implementation which is linked to the organisational structure and corporate culture (Aswathappa & Reddy, 2010:202; Thompson & Martin, 2010:635). In order for staff to be committed, they must be aware of the short-term and long-term goals of the organisation and they need to be committed to achieve these (Essop, 2013:38 & 39).

Staffs within an organisation need to have access to the right resources in order to implement strategy successfully. The resources that are important include access to information, budget, proper administrative systems, information, vehicles, telephones, computers or laptops, rewards and incentive systems (Aswathappa & Reddy, 2010:202; Katoma & Ungerer, 2011:41–45; Suarez, Calvo-Mora & Roldán, 2016:533;). Katamei, Omwono and Wanza (2015:48) state that, generally, the staff and resources of an organisation are all working for the achievement of the objectives of the organisation. The resources promote the organisation to be creative, reactive and resourceful during strategy implementation (Aswathappa & Reddy, 2010:202). A study in the Kenyan public sector found that the managers realise the importance of strategy implementation and that the financial goals can be achieved if there are clear tactical plans (Koigi & Arnolds, 2012:100). When the plans are drawn up ethically, they influence the output of the manager positively (Koigi & Arnolds, 2012:100).

Leadership is an important enabler of strategy. In terms of strategy, the strategic leader gives strategic direction to an organisation (Allio, 2015:6; Jooste & Fourie, 2009:66). The leaders engage their followers, encouraging new strategies in order for the strategy to be worthy of implementation (Allio, 2015:6; Jooste & Fourie, 2009:66). The leaders must concentrate on effective implementations, stay alert and practice the art of strategy formulation (Allio, 2015:8). According to Macintosh and Maclean (2015:118) strategic leadership is aligned to emergent strategy because stories about strategy lead to what is emerging in an organisation.

Aside from leadership, the personality traits that are important are trust and maturity, which are part of managerial and employee features which impact on strategy implementation (Gilbert & Sutherland, 2013:9). Isaac et al. (2014:69) advise that one of the crucial roles of managerial skills is to involve individuals in the decision-making which then controls resistance to change in strategy (Isaac et al., 2014:69). In support of this

view, the managers should give the employees the autonomy to do the work while still being in charge and providing guidance (Gilbert & Sutherland, 2013:11).

In order to achieve the desired outputs within an organisation, the employees that are responsible for strategy implementation must have the right technical experience and intellectual skills (Smith & Mandela, 2011: 8). In the public sector, some of the skills that the middle manager must possess are customer service skills, leadership, conflict resolution, mentoring, flexibility, change management, time management and communication skills (Meissner & Radford, 2015:788). Coupled with the appropriate skills, the other important enablers of strategy implementation are the provision of training, staff development and the transfer of knowledge (Carpenter & Jiang, 2013:13). The training that dealt with management training for public workers covered executive, emerging and foundation development management programmes (Franks, 2015:243). The outcome of having the enablers is that it leads to co-operation across key departments and the promotion of synergy between the culture, strategy and the achievement of the performance goals of the organisation (Carpenter & Jiang, 2013:13; Mosia & Veldsman, 2014:28). This is similar to the competencies that public servants must have, which are project management, change management, time management, strategic management, problem-solving management and communication (Potgieter, Basson & Coetzee, 2011:97,98).

An organisation should strive to ensure that the different departments, units and individuals work together in order to pursue the goals of the organisation (Carpenter & Jiang, 2013:13). Isaac et al. (2014) demonstrate that the way to circumvent dissatisfaction is to have a strategic plan which is linked to performance. The organisation should make use of the different viewpoints of the diverse workforce and the strategy must be flexible in order to ensure that it can be implemented (Smith & Mandela, 2011:8; Thompson & Martin, 2010:635).

The enablers of strategy implementation have been discussed in detail in the paragraphs above. The above is not exhaustive and more enablers may exist in different contexts. In the next section, the researcher discusses barriers to strategy implementation.

### **2.4.3 Barriers to strategy implementation**

Barriers refer to challenges, constraints, stumbling blocks and problems that impede strategy implementation and change (Isaac et al., 2014:66; Jooste, 2009:53, 60). The words 'challenges' and 'barriers' are sometimes used as synonyms. For the purpose of this study, the researcher uses the term barriers.

Staff within an organisation needs the right information and detail on what strategy needs to be implemented if it is to be successful. When there is a lack of details on key tasks and activities it leads to problems with strategy implementation (Isaac et al., 2014:74). The effect is task conflict, which deals with the disagreement about the outcome of the task and process conflict, which deals with assignment and delegation regarding the task (Lê & Jarzabkowski, 2015:443). The manager must be aware of the link between the task and process conflict and work on solving these barriers (Lê & Jarzabkowski, 2015:452). In support of this view, task conflict can arise when there is misunderstanding of the strategy and the practitioners who have drawn up the strategy (Lê & Jarzabkowski, 2015:452). Process conflict arises when the implementation of the strategy is not understood.

Aside from a lack of information, internal factors that can act as barriers to strategy implementation are the size of the firm, the sector within which the organisation operates, ownership and management style (Candido & Santos, 2015:255). In line with this, the environmental factors, for example economic, social and cultural aspects, may affect strategy implementation (Candido & Santos, 2015:255).

The human and personality traits that have been identified as barriers will be discussed in the narrative that follows. Lacks of strategic leadership, a poor understanding of strategy and ineffective communication of the strategy to the workforce have been identified as barriers to strategy (Jooste & Fourie, 2009:53–65). In terms of the human and personality traits, the middle managers must be aware of timing because one would need to understand when the activities will be implemented in terms of the day, time and place (Thompson & Martin, 2010:634). Thompson and Martin (2010:634) explained that the barriers to strategic implementation appear when the information and communication systems are not adequate.

#### **2.4.4 Barriers to strategy implementation in the public sector**

Strategies that are crafted by top management and government are at times not implemented as intended and it is important to understand the main causes of failure, in order for those causes that occur more frequently to be identified (Candido & Santos, 2015:257). In this section, the researcher provides a review of the literature in terms of the barriers that are faced in the public sector. The researcher also provides an overview of barriers experienced within the African context. An extensive search on the specialist subject databases on the University of South Africa library website specifically included the terms 'barriers and challenges in government in Africa' or 'experienced by middle managers in Africa'. The parameter of the research was within the continent of Africa. Not many published articles were found that focus on the managers within the South African government context.

In the publication, *Twenty Year Review South Africa 1994–2014*, the reasons for unequal performance in some government departments within South Africa were seen to be politically related, administrative, lack of management accountability, instability of administrative leadership, skills deficit, weakness in the organisational design and low staff morale (The Presidency, 2014:4-20).

In a work situation, politics can influence the work and decision-making, which can lead to an organisation either being functional or dysfunctional (Elbanna & Fadol, 2016:75–89; Swanepoel, Botha & Mangonyane 2014:1&2). The reason might be that on occasion information is blocked or hidden because of personnel conflicts (Elbanna & Fadol, 2016:75-89). This is not only pertinent to the public sector. The explanations for the failure of service delivery are that not all government organisations have strategic plans in place. Furthermore, it might be that the culture, ethics, strategic management of the organisation and the manager are not strong (Koigi & Arnolds, 2012:87–102). In a developing country such as South Africa, the implementation of strategies in government departments is very important. However, the detail of strategy implementation in practice is not known. The current study assists in plugging the gap in the knowledge of the barriers that the middle managers experience in a government environment, because an exploratory and descriptive study was carried out. The success rate of strategy implementation impacts on strategy in a government department in South Africa.

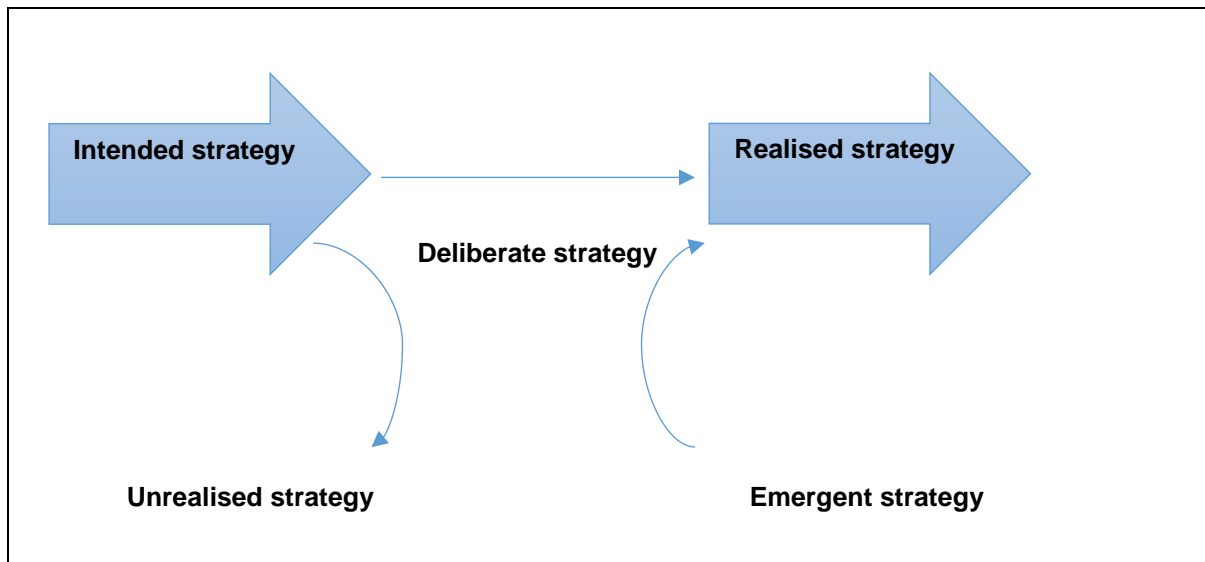
Various studies have recognised barriers that deal with human or personality attributes. In the study carried out by Meissner and Radford (2015:789) in the Australian age care facility it was discovered that at times some of the abilities that are poorly displayed by middle managers are change management, mentoring, negotiating skills, staff conduct management and self-management skills. The skills that were identified as gaps for senior managers in public service are policy development and implementation, supply chain management and performance management and computer skills, which could affect the achievement of short- and long-term goals (Franks, 2015: 245). The middle manager may not be able to deal with the demands and expectations of the position if these skills are not properly developed before promotion to this position (Meissner & Radford, 2015:789–790). The skills discussed above are similar to the reasons for the failure of some of the health care strategies in a study that was carried out in South Africa. The main factors identified as barriers included inadequately skilled people, poor planning, inadequate funding, unmotivated staff, and in some cases, the staff not being committed (Okanga & Drotskie, 2015:64).

## **2.5 STRATEGISING**

Strategising occurs when practices, praxis and practitioners interconnect (Jenkins et al., 2016:267). This was illustrated in Figure 3 above. It is therefore suggested that it is not possible to study strategy utilising the strategy-as-practice perspective without recognising the nexus between praxis, practices and practitioners (Jenkins et al., 2016:267). It can be argued that strategising connects the activities between the individual, the social and institutional context (Gomez, 2015:184). The link between the individual and their strategising actions should not be overlooked, since strategising at the micro-level is connected to strategy at the macro-level (Gomez, 2015:188). According to Fenton and Langley (2011:1171) the micro story telling by managers and others about their daily work lead to their strategy making practices. This shows the links between the strategy-as-practice perspective and narrative in sharing meaning during strategising (Fenton & Langley, 2011:1173).

The strategy is either formulated in a deliberate or in an emergent way as shown in Figure 6 below that was initially depicted by Mintzberg and Waters (1985:258).





**Figure 6: Types of strategies**

**Source: Mintzberg and Waters (1985:258)**

Mintzberg and Waters (1985:258) indicate that between intended and realised strategies, deliberate and emergent strategies occur as shown in Figure 6. This leads to the section that follows, which the researcher discusses deliberate and emergent strategies.

### **2.5.1 Deliberate strategising**

Mintzberg and Waters (1985:258) were amongst the first to distinguish between deliberate and emergent strategies. Deliberate strategy essentially conveys the precise intentions of the organisation, articulated in a relatively tangible level of detail (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985:258). In addition, there can be no uncertainty about what is required before any action is taken (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985:258). The intended actions link to the intended strategy as is shown in Figure 6 above (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985:258). Wooldridge and Floyd (1990:239) suggest that, in a relatively unchanging and predictable environment, the strategy is usually deliberate and therefore has an intended outcome. Practitioners are generally believed to be deliberate, goal-directed and intentional in the way that they do their work, especially with regard to strategy making (Chia & MacKay, 2007:228). The strategy is therefore seen as something that is done deliberately (Chia & MacKay, 2007:226). Further, deliberate strategy is viewed as a more rational and comprehensive approach (Pretorius & Maritz, 2011:25). If an organisation is large and there is stability in the environment, studies have shown that there is more a leaning towards a deliberate strategy (Pretorius & Maritz, 2011:30).

Cardoso and Lavarda (2011:3) add to this by stating that deliberate strategy involves the formalisation of strategy and it mostly involves senior managers. Deliberate strategy is characterised by central control and the officials use the level that they occupy to secure compliance (Andrews, Boyne, Law & Walker, 2011:646). It is generally understood that strategy is first deliberately formulated and is then put into action (Andrews et al., 2011:646). However, according to Mintzberg and Waters (1985), there are traces of both deliberate and emergent tendencies in crafting and implementing the strategy. Further, in the article by Mintzberg (1987:69) he reiterates that a pure deliberate strategy prevents learning and thus emergent strategising occurs. In the section that follows the researcher discusses emergent strategy.

### **2.5.2 Emergent strategising**

Emergent strategy is seen as using what works by taking one action at a time in order to promote consistency (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985:271). It involves taking a single action at a time in the quest for that viable pattern of stability and this translates to an unintended order for the managers and the organisations (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985:271). The unrealised strategy leads to an emergent strategy as seen in Figure 6 above. These strategies are derived from daily activities of staff below management level and can be seen as bottom-up decision-making (Cardoso & Lavarda, 2011:3). The decisions are made at lower levels and the use of collective actions and the concepts of learning are exploited (Cardoso & Lavarda, 2011:3). The actions that evolve are different from the original intentions of how the person would have implemented the activities that needed to be done (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985:271). The actions thus lead to the realised strategies. The emergent strategy allows the managers to be open, flexible and responsive and be willing to learn (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985). When barriers arise the practitioner narrates what actions were taken to overcome it, and this is seen as emergent strategies (Horst & Järventie-Thesleff, 2016:15–16). According to Cardoso and Lavarda (2011:3), an emergent strategy can occur when the flow of activities linked to the deliberate strategy is undertaken by various actors, but is however led by the middle manager. Deliberate strategy is seen to favour an incremental and trial and error approach (Pretorius & Maritz, 2011:25). Further, emergent strategies prosper in environments where it is encouraged and it responds to environmental change (Pretorius & Maritz, 2011:29–30).

The value of the emergent strategy is significant, as pointed out by Vaara and Whittington (2012:313), because there are often informal and unscripted activities that lead to strategy. These informal and unscripted activities assist in identifying how emergent and deliberate strategies contribute to the strategy of an organisation (Vaara & Whittington, 2012:315). In a government department, it is imperative to explore emergent and deliberate strategies because, when the strategy is drawn up, it is seen as being deliberate and during the implementation of the strategy, patterns of an emergent strategy may occur. In the section that follows the researcher discusses strategising as a lived experience.

### **2.5.3 Strategising as lived experience**

Samra-Fredericks (2003:142) contend that strategising should be studied as a lived experience as opposed to being a recorded experience. The studying of strategy as a lived experience assists with understanding how the strategy-making process evolves over time and space (Samra-Fredericks, 2003:169). Lê et al. (2013:338) suggest that researchers should focus on what individuals within organisations actually do and how it links back to the lived experiences. The focus on lived experiences strives to attain the linkages between the micro-activities (for example human interaction and talk) and the macro-activities (for example the market and social) (Samra-Fredericks, 2003:146). Balogun, Huff and Johnson (2003:197–224) state that the micro-level activity of strategising happens when the practitioners provide feedback on their capabilities that were utilised in the strategy being implemented. In other words, the activities of all the actors are then tied in with the strategy of the organisation as it assists in the implementation thereof (Lê et al., 2013:337).

When unforeseen problems arise in a working situation, the middle managers overcome or adapt to it by sharing positive emotions which form part of their lived experiences (Huy, 2011:1403). Thus strategists who implement the strategy may have to adjust or rephrase officially approved policy stories to suit their purposes and native contexts (Brown & Thompson, 2013:1152). Rouleau (2013:550) is of the opinion that the practices that are undertaken for the adjustment of strategies are executing, initiating, coordinating, supporting, collaborating and shaping of strategy work. When managers are involved in strategising they are involved in a strategic activity which involves shifting the duration from past patterns to the present day (Vesa & Franck 2013:23–34). The

practitioner can learn valuable lessons from positive strategy implementation or practices in the present day (Vesa & Franck 2013:23–34).

Orlikowski (2015:35) asserts that the routine, lived character of the everyday world of the practitioner should form the unit of analysis and this can also cover the organisational life. These studies assist to lessen the gap between scientific knowledge and the lived experience (Orlikowski, 2015:34). The purpose of the current research was to get as close to the practitioners as possible and to gauge the activities that they undertake, with a specific focus on the implementation of the strategy within a single department in the government sector. In the next section the researcher discusses strategy tools.

## **2.6 STRATEGY TOOLS**

Strategy tools are defined by Clark (1997:417) as the available techniques, tools, methods, models, frameworks, approaches and methodologies which provide for decision-making within strategic management. In addition, the strategy tools can assist in promoting conversations between the different levels of management and divisions, conveying information, problem-solving and dealing with personal differences (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015:539). In this section the researcher identifies the strategy tools in terms of the literature review.

In an article by Clark (1997:417), strategic management tools are seen to provide information generation, construction for analysis and the putting forward of ideas. Clark investigate the levels of how each strategy tool was used at each strategic task (1997:420). The phases during which the tools are investigated are situation analysis, strategic analysis and strategic implementation during the study by Clark (1997:425). In the study, some of the top tools for situation analysis was SWOT, forecasting and focus groups. The top strategy tools for strategic analyses are SWOT, forecasting and spreadsheet modelling (Clark, 1997:423). Clark (1997:425) points out that the top tools for strategy implementation are budgeting, focus groups, spreadsheets, regular monitoring, benchmarking, forecasting and reviews. The strategic management tools depicted as resources in the study are financial, human, physical and information systems (Clark, 1997:421). In the study benchmarking Porter's five forces (see Macintosh & Maclean, 2015), scenarios and SWOT analysis are identified as the top analytical tools of a company (Clark, 1997:423). In their study, Rigby and Gillies (2000:272) found that companies are still using management tools, some of which are

strategic planning, mission and vision statements, growth strategies, customer segmentation, cycle time reduction and supply chain integration.

In the paragraphs above the researcher discussed some of the tools that have been used prior to the strategy-as-practice perspective research agenda being used to investigate strategy tools. Vaara and Whittington (2012:291) explain that the strategy-as-practice perspective concerns itself with the effects of strategy tools and not only outcomes. The strategy tools serve as boundary objects because the tools promote communication and the sharing of ideas by different strategy actors (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009:228). The boundary refers to the interaction between senior and middle management and the different divisions in an organisation (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009:224). Some of the strategy tools that can be seen and touched are blueprints, prototypes, pictures, graphs, films, webpages and architecture. These tools are used in strategy (Paroutis, Franco & Papadopoulos, 2015:S62; Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009:227;).

Similar strategy tools are identified by Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015:539) in their framework of understanding strategy tools. They identify PowerPoint, formal analysis, meetings, accounting and technologies that are in use. Some strategy actors use the strategy tools to make sense of their world by ensuring that the strategy tools create a common language about strategy (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015:541). Strategy workshops and meetings have been investigated in order to show that they can influence strategic discussions (Vaara & Whittington, 2012:297).

During the study carried out by Paroutis et al. (2015:S62), the researchers point out the benefit of using visual tools and indicate that these lead to the creation and sharing of knowledge. A participant benefits from the visual versus the non-visual knowledge (Paroutis et al., 2015:S62).

In this section, the researcher highlighted the tools that are used by practitioners. In the next section, the researcher discusses the strategic practitioner, with the main discussion focusing on the middle manager.

## **2.7 STRATEGIC PRACTITIONERS**

In section 2.2.1, the term 'practitioner' was depicted as part of the elements that make up the strategy-as-practice framework. The aim of this section is to build on that

definition and discuss the strategic practitioners in terms of the literature and how it is defined for the current study.

Strategic practitioners are strategists who link formulation and implementation, as well as content and deliberate and emergent strategies in an organisation (Jenkins et al., 2016:270). The practitioner can similarly be identified as an aggregate or class of actors, which is a top or middle manager (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009:72). Regnér (2003:58) emphasises the need for further investigation of the different practitioners who are involved in strategy and how it is developed and created. The focus should therefore be on the practitioners and the activities that they undertake, which then links back to the macro-change of the organisation (Regnér, 2003:58). Strategic practitioners that deal with the strategy can be the individual actors, groups within the organisation and external actors (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Other officials that may contribute to strategy are professionals, sales persons, technological specialists and officials who work on the floor (Vaara & Whittington, 2012:311).

The strategy-as-practice perspective research agenda identified two directions of studies which did not initially focus on the top manager. The first focus area is the strategic planners that come from a consulting background and the other officials are emerging specialists (Vaara & Whittington, 2012:308). The second area that the strategy-as-practice perspective identified was the middle manager. The role that the middle manager plays with regard to strategy has gained prominence as they are seen as creators, interpreters and communicators of strategy in their organisations (Vaara & Whittington, 2012:308). In addition, Oliver (2015:339) reiterates that the middle management may affect the strategic course of the firm.

Strategy can be seen as something that the practitioners perform on a daily basis within the organisation (Horst & Järventie-Thesleff 2016:15). Thus the study of the micro-strategies of the individual assists in conveying the abilities of the leaders to think in a manner which promotes the use of emerging opportunities, innovative growth and development of the organisation (Johnson & Melin, 2016:212). Johnson and Melin (2016:212) reiterate that the micro-level strategies involve the individuals and the activities that they undertake with regard to strategy. This involves the use of their mental, emotional and cognitive structures, while the strategic actors also learn from their previous experience (Johnson & Melin, 2016:217). It is envisaged that the factors discussed above would lead to the compilation of the strategy. Whilst there are a number

of strategic practitioners, as documented thus far, the focus is on the middle management perspective, which is discussed in section 2.7.1. Darkow (2015:11) suggests that the strategy-as-practice perspective is recommended to study middle management because the perspective facilitates the narration and stories on how strategy is developed. The focus of the middle manager links back to the unit of analysis, which was the strategic practitioner in the current study. The middle manager is identified as an important strategic practitioner.

### **2.7.1 The middle management perspective**

Middle management is defined as a manager that occupies a position within two levels below the head of an organisation and one or more levels above the staff that they supervise (Al-Hakim & Hassan, 2011:952). Marin (2012:118) explains further that middle managers are seen as a buffer between the top managers and first line managers. Therefore, the middle manager occupies a management position which involves making decisions of strategic importance (Engberg, Hörte & Lundbäck, 2015:145–160).

Given this, middle managers are operating at a functional and operational level (Engberg et al., 2015:159,160). For the purpose of the current study, the middle manager was seen at a functional and operational level of the strategy implementation. The reason for focusing on the middle manager was because the current study focused on how they implemented the strategy in a government department. The middle manager was chosen because, according to Wooldridge, Schmid and Floyd (2008:1191–1192), the middle manager plays a crucial role in activities that deal with competence improvement and they see strategy making as a learning process. In the same article, the researchers indicate that, in order to gauge whether organisational outcomes are linked to middle managers' involvement, more research is warranted (Wooldridge et al., 2008:1209). This leads back to the fact that the middle manager is a linking pin between top management, lower management, officials from other departments and from outside the organisation (Rouleau, Balogun & Floyd, 2015:599). Therefore, in the next section, the researcher discusses the roles and activities of the middle manager.

### **2.7.2 The roles of the middle managers**

In this section, the researcher depicts the roles and the activities of the middle manager. The current study allowed for the micro-level activities of the middle manager that is

linked to the macro-level strategy of the government department. In terms of the middle manager, a number of studies have been done on their strategic role and these roles are discussed below (Golsorkhi et al., 2015:7).

Various authors identified key roles played by middle managers within the organisation. Three important roles recognised in the literature include middle managers as the implementers of strategy, as motivators and as coaches (Mantere, 2008:305–307; Peris-Bonet et al., 2010:361; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990:232). The middle managers improve performance by the strategic decisions that they take and by making sure that there are sufficient resources (Mantere, 2008:305–307; Peris-Bonet et al., 2010:361; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990:232). Middle managers believe that they are in a better situation to recommend, initiate and assess alternative courses of action when the need arises (Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990:238).

The role of the middle manager with regard to synthesising and communication of information is discussed in this paragraph. O'Shannassy (2009:199) adds that the middle managers are seen as generators of new ideas, communicators and facilitators of strategy. The information that is communicated is the translation of the strategic objectives of top management (Peris-Bonet et al., 2010:361; Salih & Doll, 2013:36). In communicating information, the middle manager does not work in silos and thus attempts to persuade officials into thinking differently. The middle manager communicates with officials around the globe and they work with huge volumes of information which is possible with the use of the latest technology (Rouleau et al., 2015:599). In the current global context, the middle manager communicates with officials in different ways via the use of instant messaging and electronic monitoring, and this affects the strategic role of the middle manager in the organisation (Rouleau et al., 2015:599–600).

Middle managers often play a role in the leadership for and management of staff. In order to inspire others to follow them, the middle managers will require the right conceptual, analytical, technical and problem-solving skills (Chilanga et al., 2014:79). One of the most important activities of the middle manager is that they manage staff and therefore solve emergencies that arise on a daily basis (McConville, 2006:645). The leadership role leads to the effective implementation of the strategy as the middle managers monitor activities and as they make sense of what needs to be completed (Jooste & Fourie, 2009:66; Salih & Doll, 2013:33). Further, Salih and Doll (2013:33) state



that the middle manager has to implement corrective measures when lower level staff's behaviour falls below expectations. The middle manager has first to monitor the progress of their employees' work against the objectives of the organisation and provide feedback to the employees (Gilbert & Sutherland, 2013:5). In order for feedback to be provided there needs to be an alignment between strategic intentions and employee actions and activities (Salih & Doll, 2013:35). In addition, middle managers provide support to improve the work of the officials with whom they are working (Jansen van Rensburg et al., 2014:170). In line with this the middle managers inspire learning and are seen as visionaries (Döös, Johansson & Wilhelmson, 2015:417).

Another role of the middle manager is conflict resolution as they are tasked to solve conflicts that arise on a daily basis. Therefore they need to be aware when conflict arises (Van Niekerk & May, 2012:49). Chen, Chan and Chang (2015:505) and Radaelli and Sitton-Kent (2016:311–332) support this by proposing that, when the middle manager deals with conflict, they use their micro-practices. They use networks to gain knowledge that assists with the development of technical skills (Balogun & Rouleau, 2011:960).

At the beginning of the section, an important role that was mentioned is the middle manager as implementer of strategy. In this section the researcher will discuss how the middle manager goes about fulfilling this role. According to Darkow (2015:2), middle managers are in a position to enable, delay, or impair strategy implementation through their strategic initiatives. In keeping with this, middle managers make sense of the tasks given to them, of the new idea, and how it will affect the organisation and themselves, which leads to work identity and a sense of belonging with the organisation (Palmer, Price & Whiteley, 2013:480; Radaelli & Sitton-kent, 2016:311–332). It is inferred that the strategy implementation actions of the middle manager involve conveying and clarifying individual responsibilities and the communication thereof (Salih & Doll, 2013:33). When middle managers are part of the formulation of the strategic initiatives, the consequence is that they develop ownership in terms of achieving that strategy and it leads to a better conversion rate of the strategy because of their dedication (Darkow, 2015:22–23; Salih & Doll, 2013:34;). It is suggested that, whilst some middle managers do not formulate the strategy, they do conceptualise the approach to the strategy in terms of how the work will be carried out (Lê & Jarzabkowski, 2015:456). The conceptualisation of the strategy covers what action needs to be taken by defining the micro-elements of the task that needs to be implemented (Lê & Jarzabkowski, 2015:456).

In order for the middle manager to fulfil the roles discussed thus far, they must be innovative and strategic thinkers. The proposed traits that they ought to possess are accountability, team building, relationship management and conflict management (Qiao & Wang, 2009:73). By virtue of the posts that they hold, the middle manager is held liable to translate the strategy into actions in order to deliver within the given timelines (Engberg et al., 2015:168; Qiao & Wang, 2009:76). They therefore have to understand the strategic intent of the top level manager and they should have an innovative personality (Engberg et al., 2015:168; Qiao & Wang, 2009:76). The middle managers play an important role in knowledge search and they gain information from working with senior and lower ranking officials (Tippmann, Mangematin & Scott, 2013:1872). Further, the middle manager engages top management on problems that are experienced that are not part of their daily tasks and could affect the outputs of the organisation (Tippmann et al., 2013:1872).

Middle managers further fill the role of risk manager. This is due to the fact that emergencies with which the middle manager deals can affect the strategy implementation of the organisation (McConville, 2006:645). These findings are similar to Carlström (2012:91) who indicates that the middle manager brings policies to life and helps calm troubled employees. This is advantageous to them because they are in the centre of all levels in an organisation (Tippmann et al., 2013:1872). Middle managers, by virtue of their position, must have power in a work environment, because if employees are left to do as they feel, this can be detrimental to the organisation in some cases (Tippmann et al., 2013:1872).

Within the African context various authors indicate the following key roles that the middle managers play with regard to strategy. Middle managers are champions, synthesisers, facilitators and implementers (Jansen van Rensburg et al., 2014:172; Katoma & Ungerer, 2011:38; Mantere, 2008:305–307). The way they fulfil these roles are by generating ideas, developing policies and selling strategic initiatives that are different from their current conception of strategy (Jansen van Rensburg et al., 2014:172; Katoma & Ungerer, 2011:39–40). Katoma and Ungerer (2011:39 & 40) and Essop (2013:38) continue to comment that the middle managers promote team work, encourage their staff to be trained and are tasked to build teams. This means that they should be good leaders and they should be emotionally intelligent. Building on this Essop (2013:38) indicates that the individual traits that the middle managers need in a South African

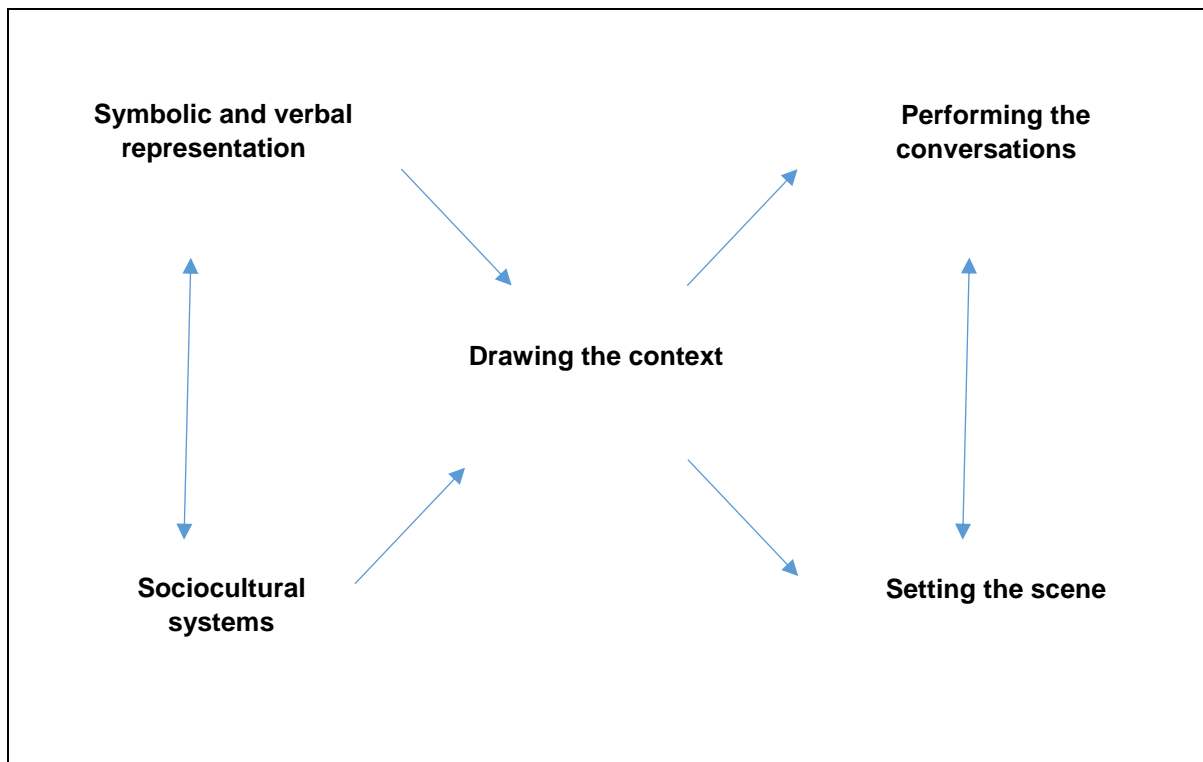
context are vision, managing complexity, integrity, flexibility, passion for learning, developing talent and teamwork. Middle managers are therefore expected to play a number of different roles within the organisation.

The literature on a whole has provided valuable insight into the roles that the middle manager undertakes in an organisation. There was an insight into some of the studies that were undertaken in an African context. It is evident, from the discussion above, that the middle manager plays an important role within an organisation. The development of the middle manager as a professional in an organisation is an important aspect that needs to be researched in the South African context, especially in the government department. Further, there are few studies that utilise the strategy-as-practice perspective to explore strategy implementation by the middle manager. Hence, the current study responded to the call for more research on the middle manager. In the next section the researcher discusses the middle manager and strategic sense-making.

### **2.7.3 Middle managers and strategic sense-making**

As discussed in section 2.7.2, the middle manager fulfils many roles with regard to strategy implementation. One of the most important roles is making sense of what is given to them and providing feedback to their subordinates in order to implement strategy. The strategy-as-practice perspective researchers have used the theoretical lens of sense-making to study the middle manager and strategy. In this section the researcher discusses the middle managers and their strategic sense-making practices.

The initial step in sense-making is that the middle manager needs to decide on the language for the conversation and when to speak to the officials, thereby setting the scene for the dialogue (Balogun & Rouleau, 2011:959). Middle managers' sense-making is dependent on their ability to use their knowledge of a situation and their articulation thereof in order to convince others to follow the decisions that the managers are making (Balogun & Rouleau, 2011:972). Strategic sense-making links back to studying strategy as a lived experience, which assists with understanding how the strategy-making process evolves over time and space (Samra-Fredericks, 2003:169). The way these strategy actors react to strategy depends on their cognitive sense-making process (Demir, 2015:S127). Figure 7 depicts the strategic sense-making of the middle manager and the activities that the middle manager undertakes with regard to sense-making (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011:958).



**Figure 7: The discursive activities of the middle manager in strategic sense-making**

**Source: Balogun and Rouleau (2011:958)**

In terms of Figure 7 the middle managers draw on their sociocultural systems in order to determine with whom they should be having a conversation. Furthermore, they use different social and verbal representations with each stakeholder (Balogun & Rouleau, 2011:959). Middle managers have influential conversations with their peers and their managers to ensure that change implementation for any situation are successful (Balogun & Rouleau, 2011:973).

The middle manager uses sense-making to make sense of information of others' interests, personal stories, the rules, routines, assumptions and language of the organisation as shown in the Figure 7 above (Balogun & Rouleau, 2011:973). Further, sense-making allows the practitioner to develop a framework for their own experiences which allows them to make sense of the new knowledge and how it impacts on their work (Filstad, 2014:6).

Sense-making is complemented by the fact that middle managers can assess the viability of proposed strategies (Salih & Doll, 2013:33). They are able to provide

feedback from these discussions which may assist them to gauge whether a proposed strategy will be implementable or not. Research into sense-making has recently concentrated on the manner in which the combination of language, cognition, behaviour and material contexts influences how strategy is created and done (Cornelissen & Schildt, 2015:349). The investigation of the sense-making of the middle manager assists in identifying the strategising activities, which include their practices and skills which can be linked to strategy implementation (Rouleau et al., 2015:605).

Sense-giving is closely linked to sense-making. Sense-giving happens when managers are able to make officials that work with them reject or give up their beliefs in favour of a new set of beliefs (Cornelissen & Schildt, 2015:358). Thus, sense-giving is seen as the mode that will be used to influence the sense-making of others. Sometimes, in a work environment, a person in a higher-ranking position can use the authority that comes with the rank or job which that person occupies. A leader will use their emotional tactics in order to ensure that the followers would accept the new beliefs (Cornelissen & Schildt, 2015:358). By virtue of the role that they play, middle managers influence the higher and the lower levels of staff in order to ensure that the strategy in the government organisation is implemented. The way that this is done is by means of the middle manager's sense-making and sense-giving activities, which are crucial in this respect.

## **2.8 CHAPTER CONCLUSION**

In Chapter 2, the researcher has provided the theoretical basis and review of the concepts that are relevant to the current study. The researcher started with a discussion of the development of the strategy-as-practice perspective followed by a review of the strategy as practice framework and typology. The elements of strategy-as-practice are praxis, practitioners and practice. Whilst all the domains of strategy-as-practice are important, the current study used Domain A (individual practitioners and micro-praxis) and Domain B (individual actors and meso-praxis) to focus on the individual actors and how they shape the strategy of the organisation.

The current study explored how deliberate strategy is implemented in a government department. The chapter also reviewed strategising with an emphasis on deliberate and emergent strategies. Strategic management and the phases were discussed in the literature review. The review of the existing research on strategy implementation was explored with an emphasis on enablers and the barriers that are encountered during this

phase. The researcher also included a description of the barriers experienced in the public sector. The researcher ended the chapter with a discussion of roles and the activities that middle managers undertake, as well as their strategic sense-making in an organisation. The researcher confirmed that there is a lack of research on how strategy is crafted and implemented in a government department from the perspective of a middle manager. Further, there is a lack of research on the strategy tools that the middle manager utilises with regard to strategy implementation in a government department. Finally, there is a gap in the research on the barriers that are experienced by the middle managers, and how these are overcome in a government department.

In the next chapter, the researcher explains the research methodology, which covers the design and the methodology for the research that was carried out. The justification for the units of analysis, the use of the research design, data collection and the method of analysis are given in Chapter 3.

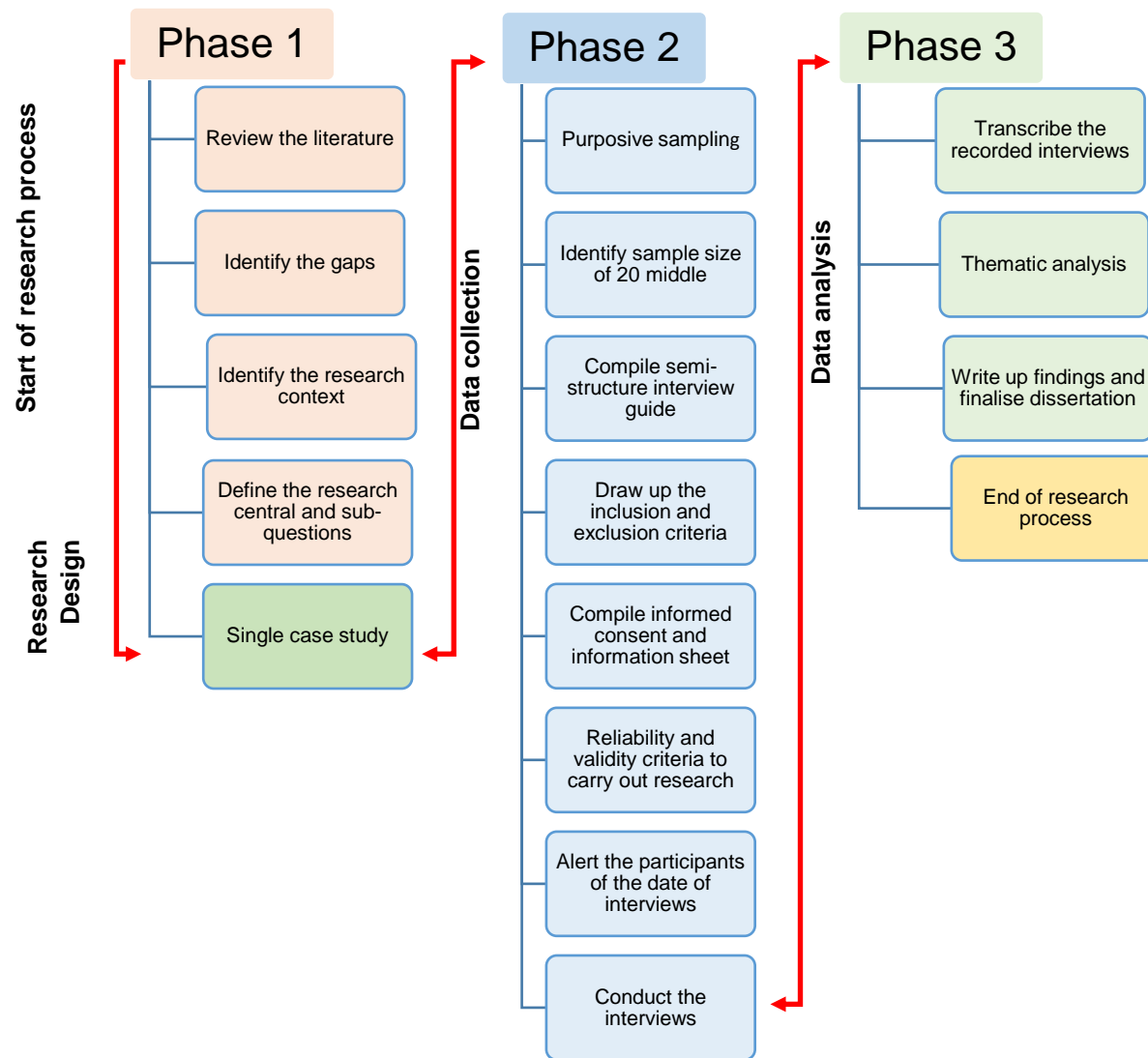
### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

In this chapter the researcher builds on earlier chapters that introduced the current study and reviewed the literature on middle managers and strategy implementation. The central question of this research study was how middle managers implement strategy in a single government department in South Africa. The literature review confirmed the roles, activities and strategy tools that the middle manager undertakes and uses with regard to strategy implementation. In the literature review, the body of knowledge confirms the challenges of strategy implementation in a government context. This prompted a study to be carried out from a South African context, using the lens of the strategy-as-practice perspective focusing on middle managers and how they implement strategy in the government environment.

In Chapter 3, in order to address the gaps in the body of knowledge, the researcher describes the design and the methodological process followed in the current study. The chapter begins with a description of the specific organisational context of where the study was carried out. The next section discusses the insider perspective and the identification of the research paradigm. The justification for the use of the research design and sampling, which covers the sampling method, sample size and selection, are discussed. The data collection method and instrument are provided and linked to the central and sub-questions. The researcher concludes the chapter with a discussion of aspects of data analysis, reliability and validity, trustworthiness and the ethical considerations relevant to the study.

The research process followed by the researcher, as discussed in the paragraph above, is depicted in Figure 8 below. The problem is that not much is known about how strategy is implemented by the middle manager in a government department.



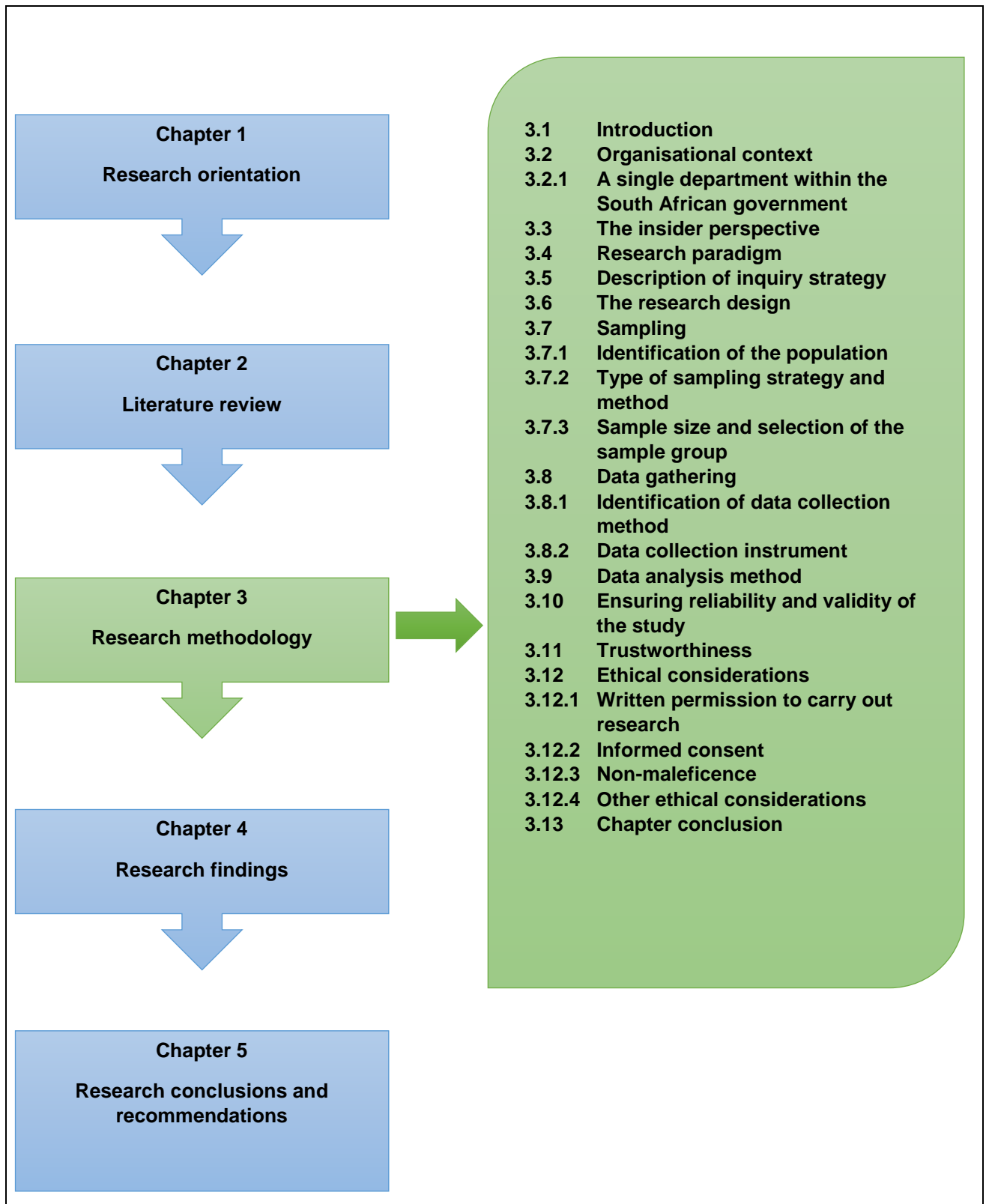
**Figure 8: Research process**

Source: Author



Figure 8 depicts the steps in the research process with the ultimate goal to answer the research sub-questions which cover the roles and activities that the middle manager undertake with regard to strategy, including the strategy tools that they use. The answering of the questions adds to the body of knowledge of the strategy-as-practice and middle management perspective.

In the section that follows, the researcher discusses the unique context of the case study organisation. The layout of the chapter is shown in the Figure 9 below.



**Figure 9: Structure of Chapter 3**

Source: Author

## **3.2 ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT**

In Chapter 1, the researcher included a discussion of the public sector in the South African context. The next section describes the case of the single department within the South African government.

### **3.2.1 Case study: A single department within the South African government**

There are many departments within the governmental sector, focusing on key areas such as housing, health, education and home affairs. The current study however only focused on a single department within the government context, namely the education department.

In the South African government, whilst there are strategies for all sectors, one of the mandates is to focus on improving the quality of and expanding access to education and training over the current electoral cycle. It is widely recognised as the number one priority of government. In order to achieve the mandate, the priorities for education in government include early childhood development, schooling, further education and training, as well as higher education (NPC, 2013).

The education governance is divided into two groups: schools and post-school groups. In terms of the budget, education takes up almost a quarter of the budget of the country (National Treasury, 2017:57). The projected budget for the schools and post-school education is R320 billion in the 2017/18 financial year and up to R369 billion in the 2019/20 financial year (National Treasury, 2017:57). The projected budget over the three year period translates to around R1 032 billion collectively (2017/18 to 2019/20) to be spent on education (National Treasury, 2017:57). In terms of a projection year on year of a 6% increase the estimated funding of education could double over the next ten years from R320 billion in 2017/18 (one financial year funding) to R541 billion in 2027/28 (one financial year funding). The fastest-growing category in education spending is post-school education and training (National Treasury, 2017:57). In the 2017 Budget Review of the country, it was highlighted that one of the factors to increase employment, is attention to skills development and education (National Treasury, 2017:23).

The staff complement of the selected government department was around 750 employees at the time of the current study. The individual staff members were employed on different levels from level 3 up to the level of the Minister. The levels of the staff at

the time of the study are depicted in Table 2 below. The middle managers at levels 9 to 12 made up the biggest staff component of the government department.

**Table 2: Staff component of the government department**

Salary level	Number	% breakdown of staff
Lower skilled (L1–2)	0	0%
Skilled (L3–5)	43	6%
Highly skilled production (L6–8)	273	36%
Highly skilled supervision (L9–12)	356	48%
Senior and top management	76	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>748</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Source: Author**

At the time of the current study, the selected government department was mid-way through the electoral cycle which was 2014 to 2019. The study took place between the eighth and the tenth month of the 2016/17 financial year. The participants were also preparing for the coming financial year which started on 01 April 2017, ending on 31 March 2018. The plans for the financial year would be in the APP for the education department. The use of a single government department is suitable because, according to Yin (2009:9), the how, the why and what questions are asked to obtain detailed information from the chosen participants. Yin (2011:7) reiterates that qualitative research promotes the study of the participant in the real world as they live their life in their environment. A single case study to understand how middle managers implement strategy in a government department was deemed appropriate.

### **3.3 THE INSIDER PERSPECTIVE**

The insider perspective is found where the researcher undertakes qualitative research in a setting of which they are already a part (Unluer, 2012:1). The advantage of this perspective is that the researcher is aware of the culture, policies and also have a great deal of knowledge which the outsider would not have (Unluer, 2012:1). At the time of the study, the researcher had more than 11 years of experience in the selected government department. The researcher was involved in the strategy implementation at directorate level. The fact that the researcher worked in the department where the research took place assisted in getting permission to carry out the research (Unluer, 2012:5). She therefore had access to documentation and employees that formed part of

the study (Unluer, 2012:5). However, the researcher did not interview any staff that she worked with directly in her directorate.

The fact that the researcher was an insider allowed for intensive research because the research was done from the inside with the aim of providing large, expressive and contextualised data on the research topic (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). In the next section the researcher describes the research paradigm of the study undertaken.

### **3.4 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

A research paradigm is a framework that guides research and can be broadly grouped into postmodernism and modernism. The research paradigm is linked to assumptions of behaviourism and makes assumptions about truths and what it means to know (Wills, 2012:8). The current study adopted a postmodernism paradigm. Modernism was used mostly in the counselling field, where the counsellor can observe a person and come to conclusions (Hansen, 2004:131). The same was applied to other observers when they would not have or could overcome biases and be truthful in the conclusions that they would eventually come to (Hansen, 2004:131). However, in postmodernism the observer creates the reality because it covers the combination of the observer and the observed (Hansen, 2004:131). Thus, the researcher cannot make assumptions regarding the participants by just observing them. In the paradigm of postmodernism, constructivism and interpretivism exists. Constructivism deals with how an individual would have behaved a particular way of making sense of things and events that have to be done (Hansen, 2004:135). Interpretivism, according to Wills (2012:7), is what the world means and is interpreted by the person, in this case regarding the participant in the study. Thus, the research was conducted within the constructivism-interpretivism paradigm.

This paradigm allows for the reality to be constructed in the mind of the person, ensuring that the hidden meaning can be brought to the surface through deep reflection (Ponterotto, 2005:129). The researcher therefore conducted the study using this paradigm because, by studying the lived experiences of the practitioner, it assists with discovering how strategy evolves, as recommended by Samra-Fredericks (2003:146). The constructivism-interpretivism paradigm was deemed appropriate as the study conducted an in-depth analysis of the practices of middle managers during strategy implementation, in addition to exploring the working lives of the middle managers.

In the next section, the researcher specifically addresses the description of the inquiry strategy.

### 3.5 DESCRIPTION OF INQUIRY STRATEGY

The qualitative approach was used for the purpose of the current study. Qualitative studies allow for the study of topics of interest (Yin, 2011:6). Thus, the choice of a qualitative study was applicable to research how the middle manager implements the deliberate strategy in a government department in the real world. The researcher wanted to understand how the strategy is implemented and thus the qualitative research assisted in the collation of rich descriptive data in this respect (Maree, 2007:50). The researcher benefited from using a qualitative study because participants provided meanings of and explanations to the questions that were asked (Creswell, 2014:186; Gillham, 2008:10). In turn, the researcher better understood what each of the participants spoke about with regard to the crafting and the implementation of the strategy. Furthermore, qualitative studies allow for a broad explanation of behaviours and attitudes and have the advantage of answering micro-questions (Creswell, 2014:65; Flick, 2014a:28). In the study, the researcher asked questions with the aim of getting nitty-gritty data on strategy from the participants in the government department. The researcher was an insider during the study, thus the qualitative research assisted her in understanding the strategy process clearly.

Marshall and Rossman (2016:2) provide reasons why qualitative research is important, as shown in Table 3 below. The researcher further provided a narrative on how these elements applied to the current study.

**Table 3: Elements of qualitative study applied to the current research**

Elements of qualitative study	How each element was used in the current study
The study takes place in the natural world.	The research took place in the natural environment of the case study organisation.
The study focuses on context.	The research focused on the government and the middle manager context.
The study is fundamentally interpretive.	The aim of the study was to provide information that is exploratory, informative and revealing.
The study is emergent and evolving.	The research was allowed to evolve as would be documented in the findings.
The study conducts the inquiries systematically.	The research questions appeared in a semi-structured interview guided and moved from the demographic questions to the empirical objective question.

Elements of qualitative study	How each element was used in the current study
The qualitative study pays attention to trustworthiness, ethical issues and the choice of the overall design.	The researcher placed trustworthiness and ethical issues at the forefront of her study. These issues are discussed in the chapter.

**Source: Marshall & Rossman (2016:2–3)**

Table 3 includes a narrative in support of using a qualitative study for the current study. The aim of the next section is for the researcher to discuss the research design of the study.

### **3.6 THE RESEARCH DESIGN**

Marshall and Rossman (2016:15) confirm that the typologies of qualitative research include ethnographic approaches, phenomenological approaches, sociolinguistic approaches, grounded theory, action research, critical discourse analysis and case studies. For the current study, a case study was adopted because the researcher needed to understand deeply the crafting and the implementation of the strategy unfolding.

Case studies permit the researcher to choose a novel setting and this may lead to the production of rich and detailed findings (Ridder, Hoon & McCandless, 2015:159:163). The setting was novel in that it was a single based case study carried out within a single government department, namely the education department. A detailed description of the context is provided in section 1,2 and a detailed case study description is provided in section 3.2.1. In the current study, the participants were interviewed at the offices of the selected government department. The case study was carried out during the same financial year of the government department, because the study was bound by time and activity as recommended by Creswell (2014:15).

The case study allows for a small number of units to be studied. In the case of the current study fourteen participants were interviewed, which was deemed appropriate as saturation was reached after 13 interviews. A more detailed discussion of the sample size and sample group is provided in section 3.7.3. Thus, the case study allowed the researcher to study the middle manager in detail. Further, the researcher was able to get in-depth data on the middle manager, because a small sample was used (Ridder et al., 2015:159).

Bertram and Christiansen (2014:43) state that case studies are used when a situation is described and better to understand the point of view of the participant. The researcher

sought to attach meaning and significance to the experience of the participants in the case study (Ridder et al., 2015:159,164). The participants provided feedback on their roles that they undertook with regard to strategy implementation in the section where they worked. The outputs of their activities were then tied to the service delivery of the selected government department. In line with this, Marshall and Rossman (2016:19) clarify that case studies explore the interaction between the case and the context which allows the unit of analysis to be clearly defined and that the boundaries of the case are identified upfront. In conclusion, it was noted that the findings allowed the researcher to make a theoretical contribution to the strategic management research agenda (Ridder et al., 2015:159,163). This is because strategy implementation is a phase of strategy management. The next section the researcher discusses the sampling.

### **3.7 SAMPLING**

This section describes the number of participants and the selection of the participants for the study.

#### **3.7.1 Identification of the population**

In section 3.2.1, it was discussed that the staff of the government department was 750 people. In terms of Table 2, middle management made up 48% of the staff of the government department. In terms of the occupational category, middle management falls under professionals and managers. The middle managers, from the case study organisation in the government department are employed on levels of 9 to 12. They were identified as officials in supervisory posts. The number of middle managers at the time of the study was 356 and they were fully employed within the government department. The breakdown of males and females was 49% and 51% respectively. Further, the breakdown of the race group was 73% for African, 4% for coloured, 7% for Indian, and 15% for White. The position of the middle manager in the government department is shown in Figure 10 below.



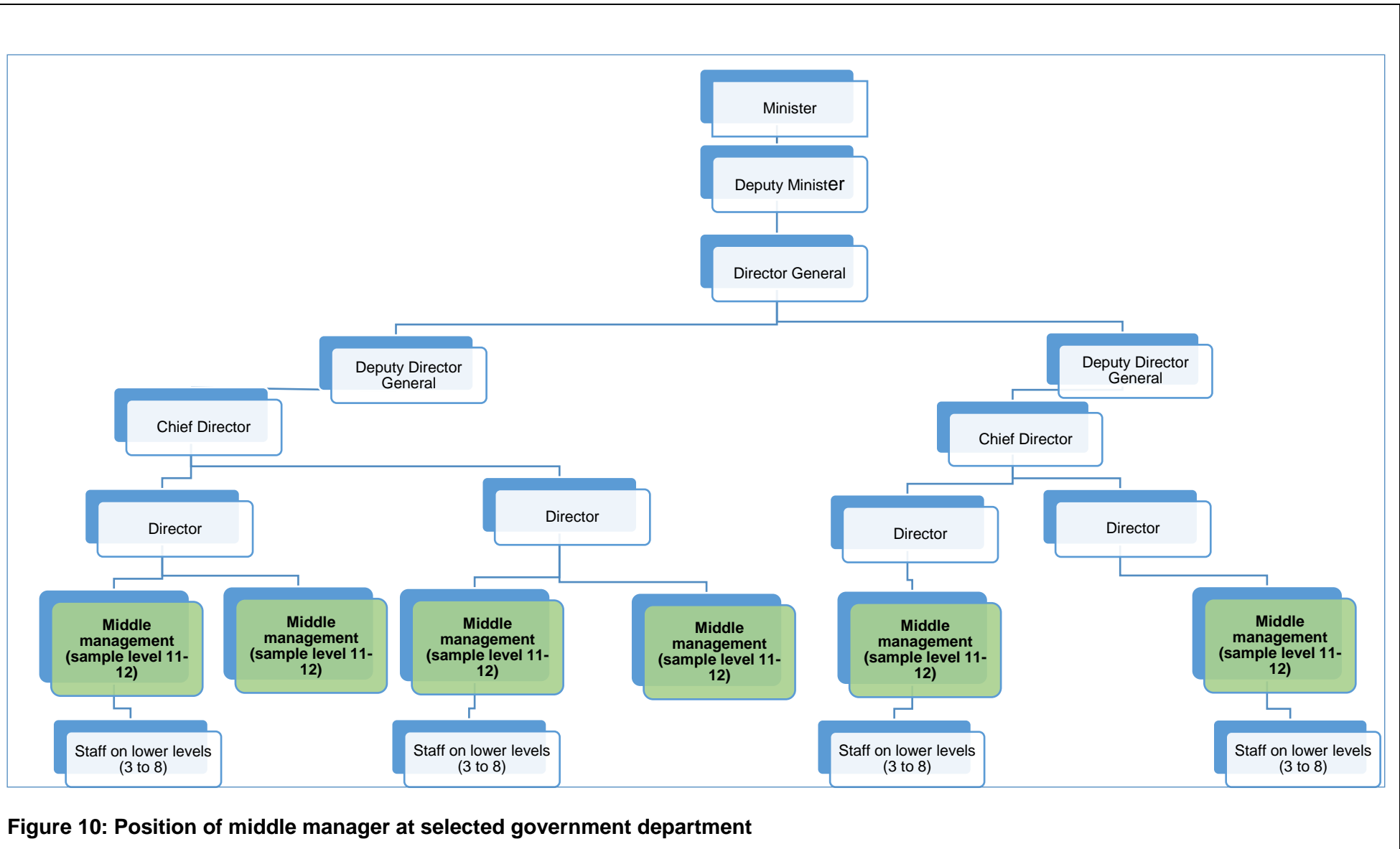


Figure 10: Position of middle manager at selected government department

Source: Author

In terms of Figure 10, middle management is depicted as professionals working above the lower levels of operational employees at the selected government department but below top management (director upwards). The employees in middle management are appointed against the post of deputy director, chief education specialist, assistant director and deputy education specialist at the selected government context. Whilst the middle managers are appointed between post levels 9 to 12, the researcher chose deputy directors and chief education specialists as the target population for the current study. The deputy directors and chief education specialist who were interviewed are appointed on the post level of 11 and 12. This is the upper salary band of the middle management level. The job weight for the middle manager was higher than those staff on level 9 and 10, who are assistant directors and deputy chief education staff. In all cases, the officials on levels 11 and 12 reported directly to the director. Further, the salary scales of the middle managers on levels 11 and 12 were higher than those on level 9 and 10. However, in some cases middle managers on level 9 and 10 reported to the chief education specialists and the deputy directors. In view of this, the researcher felt that the middle managers on levels 11 and 12 were deemed appropriate for this study.

In the section that follows, the researcher discusses the sampling strategy and method that was used to select the middle managers who formed part of the sample group.

### **3.7.2 Type of sampling strategy and method**

The sampling strategy chosen was a non-probability sampling strategy in order to identify the middle managers to participate in the current study. The method of sampling used was purposive sampling. A purposive sampling method was deemed appropriate because it allowed the researcher to choose deliberately the sample from a carefully selected sample (Teddlie & Yu, 2007:77). Further, purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method frequently used in qualitative research (Welman et al., 2005:69). When the researcher selected the middle managers for the study, she based that on the research questions that she asked in order to get rich data during the study that was undertaken. In addition, the researcher chose participants that can be seen as a depiction of the appropriate population as advised by Welman et al. (2005:69). In the section that follows the researcher discusses the sample size and the inclusion and exclusion criteria of individuals from the sample group.

### **3.7.3 Sample size and selection of the sample group**

In the current study, an adequate sample size was needed to be chosen, because the rationale for the research was known and needed to be achieved as was prescribed by Marshall and Rossman (2011:105). When the researcher chose the sample size, she bore in mind that, according to Francis et al. (2010) that after fifteen interviews behavioural beliefs would cease, normative beliefs would cease after thirteen interviews and control beliefs after fourteen interviews. It is similar to the finding of Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) who state that saturation occurs within the first twelve interviews of a study. In addition, it is estimated that 97% of codes are found in the first 12 interviews (Francis et al., 2010). The researcher knew that she had to be aware of saturation, which is when one can stop collating data when there is no new information or insights revealed in research being carried out (Creswell, 2014:189). Saturation was reached for the current study when the researcher stopped collating data once no new information or insights were revealed, which was reached at interview 13.

The researcher wanted to interview at least fifteen ( $n=15$ ) middle managers in terms of getting credible data from the interviews. The researcher however decided to choose twenty ( $n=20$ ) with the aim of getting at least 15 middle managers. The middle managers chosen had different roles from curriculum, budgeting, internal auditing, human resources, societal issues and branch co-ordinator.

A list of the middle managers was obtained from the Research Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation directorate during October 2016. In terms of the protocol, the Research Coordination, Monitoring and Evaluation directorate requested the data from the Human Resource Directorate on behalf of the researcher. The criteria that were used when choosing the middle managers for this study was their professional backgrounds (some of the examples are finance, human resources and strategic planning) and gender (male and female). The years of experience (newly appointed middle managers versus middle managers who were working for the department for more than five years) and age were also taken into account. The inclusion and exclusion criteria that were used to select the middle managers to participate in the research are shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: Inclusion and exclusion criteria**

Inclusion	Exclusion
Middle managers permanently employed.	Middle managers on contract
Middle managers that are appointed in a post for one year or more.	Middle managers that are appointed for less than one year in this position.
Middle managers from different branches and directorates.	More than two middle managers from one directorate or more than four middle managers from one branch.
Middle managers that deal with key strategies in the Department of Education.	Middle managers who only deal with administrative duties.
Interview middle managers of all race groups, female and male.	Middle managers representing one race group and gender.

**Source: Author**

The criteria used to identify the participants are mentioned in Table 4 above. The list did not include contract workers and middle managers that were only one year in the post. The list comprised middle managers of most of the race groups and an equal number of males and females were chosen. The reason was to provide a representative sample of the target population within the government department as depicted in Table 4. The number of middle managers chosen per race group was 15 Africans, 3 whites and 2 Indians. The identified list of middle managers' names was given to the Research, Monitoring and Evaluation directorate who arranged for the interviews. The staff member from the Research, Monitoring and Evaluation directorate who arranged for the participants to be interviewed signed a confidentiality agreement. The middle managers were informed via electronic mail and telephonically of the time and the place of the interview. This condition was important because the middle managers would know that the interview was approved by the government department in order for the research to proceed. From the list of 20 participants, two declined, three did not respond to the invitation to be interviewed and one decided not to go ahead with the interview prior to it starting. The profile of the participants and the pseudonyms used are discussed in detail in the research findings in section 4.2.

In the section that follows, the researcher discusses the data gathering method.

### **3.8 DATA GATHERING**

This section describes the data collection method and instrument that the researcher uses for the current study.

### **3.8.1 Identification of data collection method**

Marshall and Rossman (2016:141) confirm that the basic data collection methods for a qualitative study are participating in a setting, observing directly, interviewing in-depth and analysing documents and materials. Whilst all the data collection methods are important, the use of interviews was adopted for the current study. The aim of this section is thus to provide motivation why interviews were used in this case study.

The data gathering instrument that was used in the gathering of data for case studies was interviews because it covers human affairs or behavioural events (Yin 2009:107,109). Gillham (2008:62) had originally indicated that interviews are conducted to gather in-depth data. He continues to state that a small number of participants can be interviewed and are accessible (Gillham, 2008:62). In support of the view, 14 middle managers were interviewed from November 2016 to January 2017.

In line with the objective to gather deep data, interviews offered the researcher the option to use open-ended questions which allowed the opportunity for further probing or prompting for answers as indicated by Gillham (2008:62). The interview guide provided for three types of questions namely, main questions, follow-up questions and probes. Efforts were made to ensure that the interview questions are clear, concise and appropriate and without any hidden agendas (Salkind, 2012:150). The researcher used the three types of questions with the aim to get more depth, detail and illustration of the case study of the middle managers' experiences in strategy and how it is implemented (Flick, 2014a:208).

In the case of the current study, the interviews were conversations between the researcher and the participant (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014:80). Apart from this, the interview quickly yielded data in quantity (Marshall & Rossman, 2016:150). A possible disadvantage of interviews is that the interviewee is unable to convey their thoughts and the researcher may not ask the questions correctly in a way that induces a proper response (Marshall & Rossman, 2016:151). The researcher overcame this problem by recording all the interviews and answering questions that were asked by all participants when they sought clarity on the questions being asked. All the participants were provided with an information sheet prior to the interviews which covered frequently asked questions regarding the research. Furthermore, the researcher could

not decide in advance what direction the probing would take as depicted by Flick (2014a:215). The researcher can prompt the participant in what to say by reflecting their own behaviour or beliefs (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014:82–83). However, the researcher did not do this because she had a semi-structured interview guide which assisted in asking the questions to the participants in a professional way and not to disturb the integrity of the interview. The researcher had discussed the interview challenges that arose during the initial interviews with the research supervisors and sought advice on how to overcome problems that had arisen in debriefing meetings.

There can also be gathering of large textual data which is hard to keep track of (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014:82:83). The researcher made sure that she had a proper filing section so that she could move between the different aspects of the research for example literature review, interviews and research findings. In the next section the researcher discusses the data collection instrument.

### **3.8.2 Data collection instrument**

The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide as the main data collection instrument. This is seen as one of the most important questioning approaches in a case study as it provides rich sources of data (Gillham, 2008:65).

Prior to the development of the semi-structured interview guide, the researcher undertook an intensive review of the literature in order to identify the gaps that existed with regard to middle management and strategy implementation. The review of the literature assisted the researcher in identifying the gaps that existed and supported her in taking a decision on the research context for the current study. After the research context had been identified, the researcher studied a number of articles with the focus on compiling the research questions. The researcher concentrated the literature review on studies undertaken in terms of middle management and adopted the strategy-as-practice perspective with regard to the questions asked during these studies. The review of previous studies led to the researcher to develop a central research question with three sub-questions. A set of specific objectives was drawn up as it appears in the semi-structure guide (see Appendix A). This led to the actual set of questions that were asked during the interviews. The aim of the questions was to answer the central question of the current study. The semi-structured interview questions were aligned to the three sub-questions; then deliberated with the research

supervisors, and then those that did not contribute to answering the research sub-questions were removed.

Each interview was unique and provided for some amendment to the order of the questions based on the participants' responses during the interviews. The questions generally started at the organisational level, then focused at the directorate level and then the focus moved to middle managers themselves and their experiences. It permitted the flexibility for questions to be added as and when the researcher saw fit. This enabled the researcher to ask follow-up questions in order to seek clarity on a response provided by the participant that was not clearly understood.

The researcher made sure that the questions asked would elicit rich and thick descriptions during the interview (Creswell, 2014:202). Prior to the interviews starting, the voice recorder was switched on. The first set of questions was designed to build rapport, to identify the level of experience and ascertain the length of time the middle manager has been in this position. The questions that followed were aimed at exploring the role that the middle manager (practitioner) played in the strategy process and how the strategy was crafted in the government department. The last set of questions dealt with the barriers and challenges that the middle manager experiences and how they overcome these barriers. Lastly, the middle manager was given the opportunity to provide feedback on possible changes to the crafting and implementing the strategy. The semi-structured interview guide is attached as Appendix A.

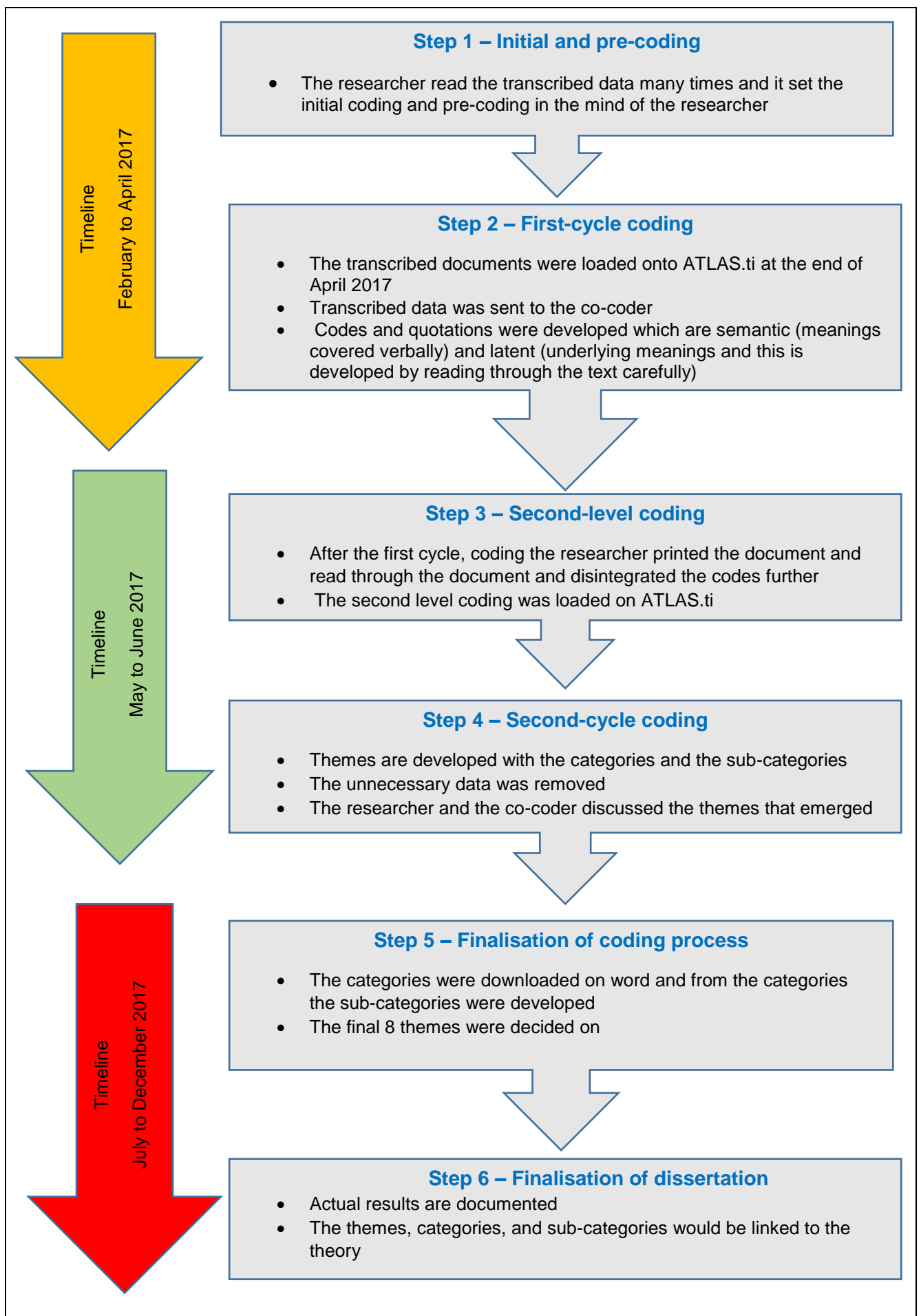
The researcher kept a self-description narrative after each interview, and this included comments by the researcher on how the interviewees interpreted the findings to be shaped by their background, gender, history and socio-economic origin (Creswell, 2014:202). The notes were the researcher's reflective notes. The researcher made notes of whether the participants were nervous during the interviews, how comfortable they were and how they answered the questions. These can also be seen as field notes in which notes about the interview are kept and also about the non-verbal behaviour of the interviewee (Welman et al., 2005:199). There was peer debriefing whereby the research supervisors of the researcher provided feedback on the research as it was being carried out and the documentation of the findings upon conclusion of the study (Creswell, 2014:202). In the section that follows the researcher discusses the data analysis method.

### **3.9. DATA ANALYSIS METHOD**

Once the data was collected and transcribed it was deemed ready for analysis. The method that was considered applicable for the current study was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method that identifies, analyses and reports on patterns within the data (Flick, 2014a:21). The consequence hereof is that themes that are captured depict something important in the data in relation to the research that is being undertaken (Braun & Clarke, 2006:82). Further, the thematic analysis allows the researcher to check themes across a whole data set rather than just one interview that has taken place (Braun & Clarke, 2006:81). Thematic analysis was done from the data that was transcribed by the transcriber into the mass word data base. The transcriber transcribed the data over a two week period during February 2017. The data was then quality checked by the researcher during March 2017. This involved listening to the audio recording of the Word document.

The thematic analysis process that the researcher employed is depicted in Figure 11 below.





**Figure 11: Thematic analysis**

**Source: Adapted from Flick (2014a:422) and Saldaña (2009:3)**

In conjunction with the steps of the thematic analysis by Flick (2014a:422), the researcher used the framework of Saldaña (2009:3), which covered the preliminary jottings, pre-coding, first cycle coding, refinement of first level coding and second coding cycle in the coding of the data. A code is a word or short phrase that identifies a portion of language-based or visual data (Saldaña, 2009:3). Coding is a representation of analytical thinking as reiterated by Marshall and Rossman (2016:222). The researcher was immersed in the data in that she read and reread the data in order to come up with the final themes of the study as prescribed by Marshall and Rossman (2016:217). The researcher then utilised the codes to group them into similar categories and sub-categories (Saldaña, 2009:8–10). The thematic analysis is discussed in more detail in section 4.2 in terms of the themes, categories and the sub-categories.

The researcher kept the research questions close by and constantly referred to them during the data analysis. The aim was to answer the research questions in terms of the current study. This is in line with what Flick (2014b:170) prescribes. The researcher found that she asked herself similar questions when she was busy with coding as described by Tuckett (2005:84). She would reflect on what the participants said in terms of what was being described in response to the research questions. The researcher would gauge what she understood by what the participants were saying, in terms of where they were working and the work that they were doing. The aim was that she could reflect the truth of what the participants wanted to articulate through the themes and eventually this would be reflected in the findings (Tuckett, 2005:84).

A co-coder was assigned to co-code the transcribed interviews at the same time that the researcher was performing her process of first-cycle coding. In order to increase the credibility of the coding, the co-coder was an independent, objective consultant who had no knowledge of the topic under study. The independent co-coder signed a confidentiality agreement. The co-coder communicated with the researcher so that the final themes between the two could be discussed. The themes that were coded by the researcher and the co-coder are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

The computer programme ATLAS.ti was used to during the data analysis. The researcher elaborates more on the computer programme in section 4.2 of the dissertation. In the next section, the researcher discusses the reliability and validity of the current study.

### **3.10 ENSURING RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE STUDY**

In qualitative research, validity refers to the accuracy of the findings by employing procedures, while reliability shows that the approach is consistent across different researchers and various projects (Creswell, 2014:201). According to Marshall and Rossman (2016:44), historically the reliability of a study focuses on quality. In the remainder of the section, the researcher narrates the steps she took to ensure the reliability and validity of the current study.

In terms of the interviews, each interview was recorded and the transcriptions of the interviews were done by an independent transcriber. The researcher did quality control by listening to the audio interview and correlating it against the transcribed Word document (Creswell, 2014:203). During this procedure, the researcher was able to correct words that were not properly captured by the transcriber or words that could not be understood by the transcriber. The transcriber inserted the word [INDISTINCT] for words where she was unsure of the pronunciation. The researcher kept notes of how the transcribed data was quality checked. The researcher was aware of fatigue that might have influenced the transcription of data by the transcriber (Mero-Jaffe, 2011:233). The transcriber was able to understand the voice recordings with very few words that she could not understand. The transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement prior to the commencement of transcription and all the interviews were delivered personally by the researcher to the transcriber. This was in order to ensure that no information pertaining to the research was revealed to any outsiders. The transcriber transcribed the recording by herself. This confirms that the well-being of the interviewees and the integrity of the researcher were adhered to by the transcriber (Mero-Jaffe, 2011:241).

The transcriptions were kept in a Word document. To protect identities, all participants were assigned a pseudonym and the files were kept under an alias file name. The transcripts had the dates and times of the interviews. However, only the researcher knew who was interviewed. The researcher took all steps in order to maintain the confidentiality of the interviewees. The researcher kept track of who the transcripts had been shared with, for example: the transcriber and the co-coder. The assignment of the fictitious names was only understood by the researcher. Moreover, the researcher had managed the data to ensure that the information was accessed quickly as recommended by Flick (2014b:306).

### **3.11 TRUSTWORTHINESS**

The components relating to trustworthiness of the research are transferability, dependability, credibility and confirmability (Flick, 2014b:576). Transferability was defined as ways in which the findings of the study could be useful to similar studies (Marshall & Rossman, 2011:252). This was done by applying the use of questions and sub-questions in the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011:252). The researcher described every step of the process in as much detail as possible to enable the reader to decide if the findings are applicable (or can be “transferred”) to another situation as was discussed above in the section on identification of the data collection instrument. The researcher spoke about the self-descriptive narrative in section 3.8.2 above.

The researcher dealt with dependability by ensuring that detailed accounts were kept of the changing contexts and circumstances during the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011:253). The key objective was for the researcher to give a realistic view of the research. In order to ensure credibility and validity, the researcher had to be in the setting for a long period to share data and the interpretation of the findings with the participants of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016:47).

In terms of conformability, the researcher attempted not consciously to sway the participants in their answers to the research. The researcher made use of the semi-structured interview guide to ask questions. Further, the researcher did not disturb the participants while they answered the questions, but rather provided clarity on the questions when she was asked. In addition, the researcher neither approved nor disapproved the participants’ actions and remained calm even if the participant became resistant to the interview (Welman et al., 2005:200). In this regard, the researcher did not force two of the participants to continue further with the interview when one asked for the interview to be stopped and the other participant did not want to be interviewed. In addition, the participants did not work with the researcher. This guaranteed they were not influenced by the researcher. The researcher created an audit trail that consisted of all the raw data, analysis notes, reconstruction and synthesis notes, process and personal notes. Part of the audit trail of the data was set up using the computer software ATLAS.ti. In the section that follows the researcher discusses the ethical considerations.

### **3.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Ethics in research has to do with what is considered to be right or wrong in terms of the researcher's behaviour (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014:65). This is important, especially when research covers humans and animals (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014:65). In this section the researcher documents the process that the researcher undertook for the research to proceed.

#### **3.12.1 Written permission to carry out research**

In order for the research to proceed, it was essential that the researcher, as prescribed by Creswell (2014:96), obtained permission for the research to take place.

A letter of approval was given with permission for the study to proceed by the government department when the researcher wrote to the department in order to get the go-ahead for the current study. There was a provision that the findings of the research be shared with the government department once the current study was finalised. The department was provided with the semi-structured interview guide in order to ascertain that the participants will not be harmed during the interview. The government department was not identified in the research. The research also had to be approved by the University of South Africa's (Unisa) Review and Ethics Board in order for the research to continue. In keeping with this, the study was approved by the Department of Business Management Research Ethics Review Committee at Unisa on 12 September 2016 in order to be carried out. The ethical clearance number was 2016\_CEMS\_BM\_51. The committee's approval covered the research design and methods. A copy of the ethical clearance certificate is included in Appendix B. In the section that follows the researcher discusses autonomy and informed consent.

#### **3.12.2 Informed consent**

The participants had received a clear explanation of what the researcher expected of them so that they could make an informed choice regarding whether to take part in the research or not, as prescribed by Bertram and Christiansen (2014:65).

The participant information sheet (Appendix C) and the informed consent form (Appendix D) were sent to all participants prior to the interview by the Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate of the government department via electronic mail. The information sheet included questions that are generally asked in terms of the aim of the study, matters of confidentiality aimed at protecting the participant and where

the data would be stored. Further, the participants were also sent the letter that was received from the government department (Appendix E) and the Department of Business Management Research Ethics Review Committee for the research to be carried out.

During the interviews, the researcher disclosed the purpose of the study to the participants by developing the central intent or questions for the study as was advocated by Creswell (2014:97). In keeping with this, the different cultural, religious and gender differences of the participants being interviewed were respected (Creswell, 2014:97). The result of this was that all the participants then signed the informed consent form prior to the start of each interview.

It was envisaged that, when the participants signed the consent forms, this ensured that the participants knew what they had consented to (Wiles, Charles, Crow & Heath, 2006:295). One of the most important elements of informed consent is that any of the participants can opt to stop the interview and not be part of the interview. The risk that could be identified is that the researcher may have a conflict of interest because she herself is a middle manager. This was overcome by the fact that the researcher did not interview any of the middle managers working with her. The researcher had to remain visibly trustworthy, transparent and ensure that no deviation was made from the research topic. The probability of anticipated harm or inconvenience in the research was not greater than that experienced in daily life.

### **3.12.3 Non-maleficence**

In the previous section, the researcher discussed the importance of the informed consent. In this section, the researcher discusses non-maleficence. Non-maleficence means that the research should not cause any harm to the participants or other people (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014:66). In keeping with this, the identity of the participant should be kept confidential and the participants were informed of how the research would be made public (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014:66). The researcher mitigated these risks by making sure that the participants were given an information sheet answering all questions about the research.

### **3.12.4 Other ethical considerations**

In this paragraph, the researcher documents areas that was crucial to ensuring that the researcher abided to ethical behaviour with regard to other aspects of the

research. The transcribed data was kept in a safe place and access was limited to only the researcher. The computer-based records were stored on a password protected laptop. The file names were coded. The focus on the language of the medium used during the interview was English in order to ensure that the participants could understand and provide detailed feedback to questions asked.

The researcher has a filing system in which the files can be easily accessed. After the transcriptions were handed over to the researcher, the transcriber was required to delete all the paper-based and transcribed data. The researcher ensured that this process appeared in the confidentiality agreement that was signed by the transcriber. The transcribed data and all other information pertaining to the research will be kept for five years by the researcher. The paper-based information will then be destroyed by being shredded and the computer-based files and audio recordings will be deleted after five years. The findings of the research would be shared with the department and the participants where the study took place.

### **3.13 CHAPTER CONCLUSION**

The aim of this chapter was to describe the research methodology that was followed in order to carry out the research. The research was carried out using a qualitative approach. The research design, which was a case study, allowed for fourteen middle managers to be interviewed. The aim of using a case study was deemed appropriate to answer the central and sub-questions of the study.

The choice of the sampling strategy, identification of the unit of analysis, sample size and selection of the participants was motivated in detail by the researcher. The use of the interview and the semi-structured interview guide assisted the researcher to get detailed responses from most of the middle managers during the current study on their roles with regard to strategy implementation and how they overcome barriers that they face on a regular basis in a government department. The researcher employed steps in ensuring reliability, validity and ethical considerations during the current study. Thematic analysis was the method that was used for the data analysis. The research methodology chosen fits in with the method of studying strategy through the lens of strategy-as-practice perspective. The methodology enabled the researcher to gather reliable data in order to deal with the problem of the lack of research on how strategy is crafted and implemented in a government department from a middle management

perspective. The research methodology used in the study is thus considered applicable to explore the strategising activities of the middle manager in a government department.

In Chapter 4, the researcher will discuss the findings of the current study.



## **4. FINDINGS**

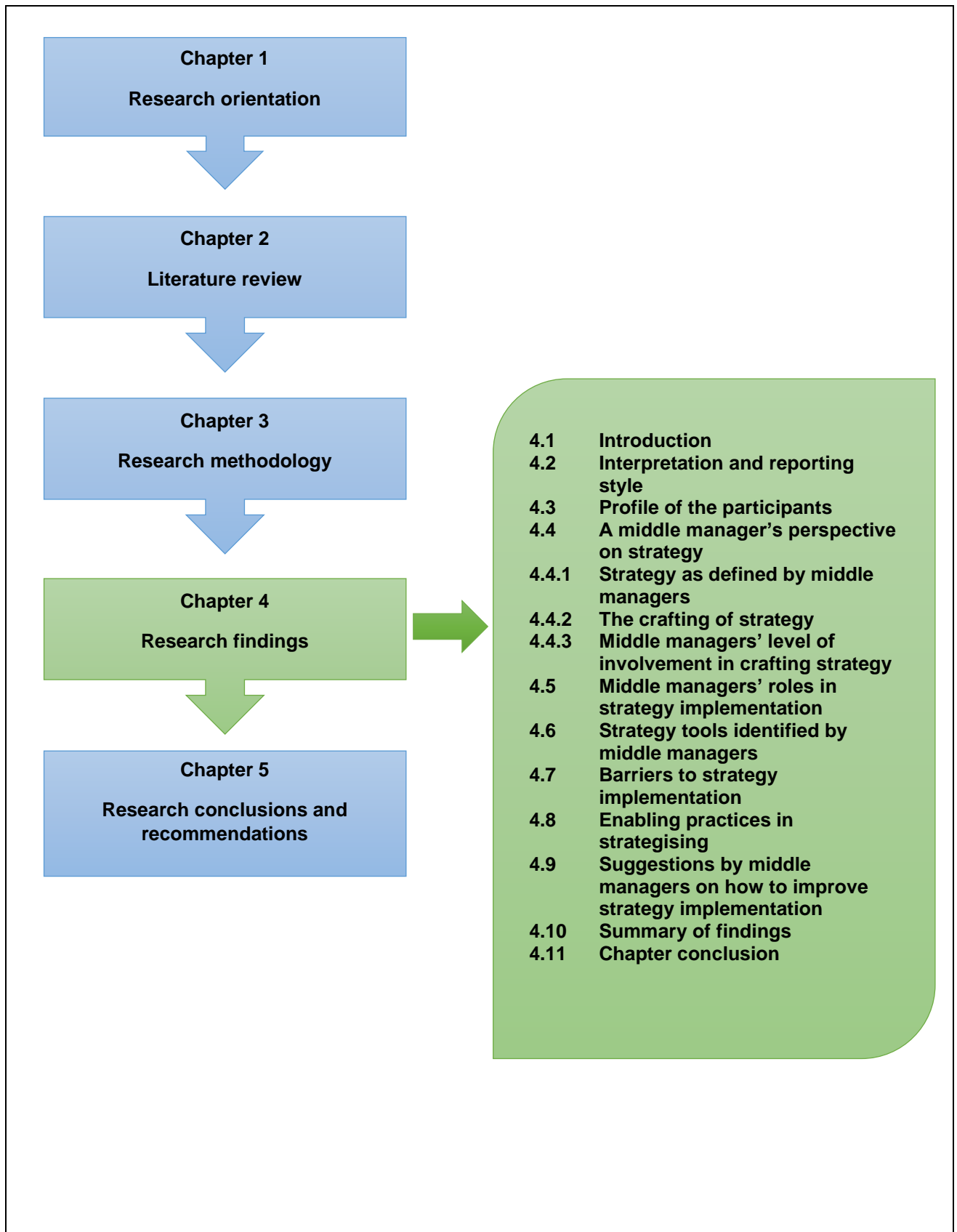
### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In Chapter 3, the researcher described how the research was carried out. The aim of Chapter 4 is for the researcher to present the findings of the current study. The current study sought to answer the empirical objective, which was how middle managers implement the strategy in a government department in the South African context. The literature review revealed the gap that not many studies have been done on the middle manager utilising the lens of strategy-as-practice to explore how strategy is implemented in a government context. The notion is that, whilst there are numerous roles that the middle manager undertakes with regard to strategy implementation, the current body of knowledge does not fully depict this in the context of a government department in South Africa. There are many barriers that have been identified in the public sector but there is a lack of research that builds on this in the South African government context. Hence, the current study contributes to the body of knowledge of how the middle manager implements strategy in a government department, specifically focusing on the roles that they undertake in this context.

The researcher starts the chapter with an explanation of the interpretation and reporting style of the study. This section is followed by a discussion of the participants and the unique context of the study. The sections that follow are aimed at answering the sub-questions of the research, which are:

1. What are the roles and activities that the middle manager undertakes with regard to strategy implementation?
2. What are the tools that the middle manager uses with regard to strategy implementation?
3. How do middle managers deal with barriers that arise during strategy implementation?

The chapter layout is shown below in Figure 12.



**Figure 12: Structure of Chapter 4**

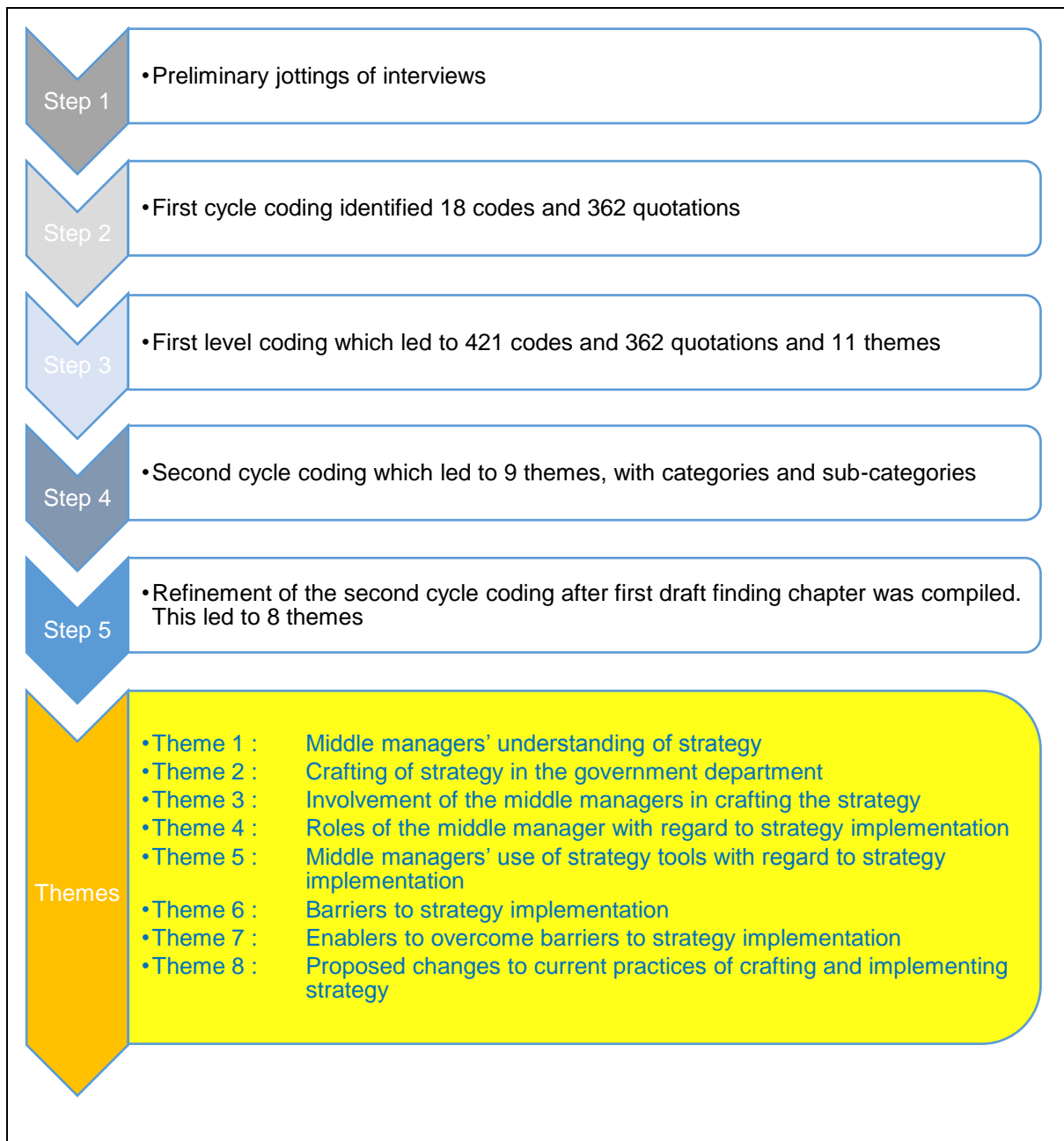
**Source: Author**

In terms of presenting the empirical findings, in the first section, the researcher describes the middle manager's perspective on strategy within a single government department, focusing on three aspects: a middle manager's perception of strategy; the crafting of strategy within the department; and a middle manager's level of involvement in crafting the strategy. In the next section, the researcher details the roles that the middle manager undertakes with regard to strategy implementation. This is followed by a review of the strategy tools that were identified by middle managers and the barriers that impeded strategy implementation. The middle managers also discussed the enabling practices that assisted them in strategising and lastly they provided recommendations on how to improve strategising activities within the department. In the section that follows the researcher discusses the interpretation and reporting style.

## **4.2 INTERPRETATION AND REPORTING STYLE**

In Chapter 3, the researcher provided a detailed description on how the data was analysed. In this section the researcher builds on what appeared in that chapter.

Approaches were taken from Flick (2014a:422) and Saldaña (2009:3) in devising the final themes, categories and sub-categories. The outcomes include the themes identified in the research as shown in the Figure 13 below. The codes lead to the description of the categories and sub-categories which are linked to the themes of the study.



**Figure 13: Steps undertaken in data analysis**

**Source: Author**

The researcher did preliminary jottings after the interviews, in which the field notes were rewritten in a concise manner as prescribed by Saldaña (2009:17). Linked to the interview timelines, the researcher did the preliminary jottings from November 2016 to January 2017. The notes included jottings on the researcher's perception of the participants' answers to the questions. The jottings also included her own experiences as the research instrument. As stated in Chapter 3, the data was sent to an independent

transcriber to be transcribed during February 2017. When the researcher received the transcribed data, she read the transcribed data and verified it against the recordings. The recorded interviews translated into 313 minutes and 38 229 words. The transcribed data was 106 pages long. Consequently, this sets the initial coding themes or the pre-coding in the researcher's mind, which she made note of manually.

According to Saldaña (2009:3), in the first-cycle coding the process can range from a single word to a full sentence. The codes can then be categorised and sub-categorised (Saldaña. 2009:9). The first-cycle coding started at the end of April 2017. The transcribed data was sent to the co-coder during April 2017. During the first-cycle coding the researcher loaded the fourteen transcribed documents in ATLAS.ti. The researcher then read the semi-structured interview guide and identified possible further themes not recognised in the initial and pre-coding phases. The researcher read each interview and identified 18 codes with 362 quotations. After the first-cycle coding, the researcher printed the codes and quotations, which was 117 pages long. During this time, the researcher read the first-cycle codes and she further disintegrated the codes. This means that additional codes were added, as the initial codes were separated. The manual coding was then captured in ATLAS.ti and the split code was created. This resulted in 421 codes and the 362 quotations. Eleven groups were formed which were seen as the themes, categories and sub-categories.

The second-cycle coding led to the merging of groups, which led to the nine themes. At this stage, the researcher and the co-coder discussed the codes that had emerged from their separate coding exercises and the themes that were drawn up. The aim was for the co-coder to confirm or refute the themes and codes of the researcher. The final coding which consisted of 8 themes is shown in Figure 13 above.

The coding was done in ATLAS.ti, which was used to store, organise, manage and reconfigure the data to enable analysis (Saldaña, 2009:23). The programme, however, does not do the coding; this was done by the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2016:217). ATLAS.ti allowed the researcher to shift between the functions quickly and it allows the researcher to shorten, delete, merge, or rename codes or groups as prescribed by Saldaña (2009:26). The referencing system that was used to report on the findings was consistently created by ATLAS.ti. The fourteen transcribed interviews were imported into ATLAS.ti as primary documents, which included the anonymised participant numbers.

The referencing system is illustrated by the following example: 'in reference (D2: Recording\_5----3C - 2:23(11645:11864))'. The explanation of the referencing system is shown in Table 5 below.

**Table 5: Interpretation of the referencing of the participants on ATLAS.ti**

Referencing	Meaning
D 2	The order that the document is saved in ATLAS.ti. Therefore, D 2 was the second document loaded from the 14 primary documents.
Recording_5----3C	The file name that was given by the researcher which would include the participant's pseudonym, which is 3C.
2:23	The quote is the 23 <sup>rd</sup> in document 2 in respect of Participant 3C.
(11645:11864)	This translates to the space where the quotation starts and ends in the document

**Source: Author**

The researcher found that she employed both deductive coding and inductive coding. Deductive coding covered thematic coding that utilised a logical framework. Inductive coding involved the themes that emerged from the participants' discussions in the coding process (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006:9). In the section that follows, the researcher discusses the profile of the participants.

### **4.3 PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS**

In this section, the profile of the participants will be discussed. The researcher further paints a picture of the context of the research at the government department. The researcher had chosen twenty possible participants to be interviewed, however, in the end only fourteen were interviewed by the researcher. The participants work in different directorates in the government department namely finance, curriculum, human resource, internal audit, examinations, assessment, planning and social mobilisation and support.

The participants' profiles are shown in Table 6. The order of the participants does not show the order of the interview but rather the pseudonyms that were given to each participant at the sample selection. The pseudonyms are the order of chosen participants in the Excel file received from the Research, Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate at the department where the interviews were held and the alphabet is attached to each number, for example, 1A , 2B and 3C starting from the first chosen participant to the twentieth one.

**Table 6: Profile of the participants**

Participants	File name on ATLAS.ti	Gender	Race	Number of years as middle manager	Level of study
1A	D 1: REC007---1A	M	A	9	Master's in Business Administration
3C	D 2: Recording_5---3C	M	A	7	Degree in teaching
5E	D 3: REC006---5E	M	A	21	Honours
7G	D 4: Recording_2--7G	F	A	4	Diploma in cost and management accounting
8H	D 5: Recording_3--8H	F	A	15	Degree in teaching
11K	D 6: REC008----11K	F	W	20	Master's
12L	D 7: REC005----12L	M	A	12	Master's
13M	D 8: REC010----13M	M	A	8	Degree in teaching
14N	D 9: 14 N	F	A	9	Bachelor of Commerce
15O	D 14: Recording_4-----15O	F	A	12	Master's
16P	D 10: Recording_6-----16P	F	A	6	Master's
17Q	D 11: REC011---17 Q	M	I	10	PhD in Education
18R	D 12: REC004---18R	F	A	10	Degree in Social Work
19S	D 13: REC009---19S	F	A	10	Honours: BCom

**Source : Author**

The table includes the file name of the participants as it appears in ATLAS.ti. Table 6 only shows the fourteen participants that were interviewed. The qualifications of all the participants are also shown as well as the number of years that each of the participants worked as a middle manager.

The Research Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate contacted all participants via telephone and electronic mail with regard to their participation in the interview. The

interviews took place between November 2016 and January 2017, during the 2016/2017 financial year of the organisation. In a government context, the financial year is from April of one year to March of the following year. In terms of the five-year electoral cycle from 2014 to 2019, the dates for the interview were midway through the current electoral cycle. The middle managers are responsible for ensuring that the deliverables that appeared in the APP are achieved before the end of March 2017. The compilation of the 2017/18 APP for the selected government department at this stage was in the draft stages. In some cases, the middle managers had to give feedback into the 2017/18 Annual Performance Plan before it was finalised.

All the participants were permanent employees of the government department at the time of the interview. The interviews took place during lunch breaks, tea breaks and at other times when the middle manager was available to be interviewed. Participant 16P did not complete the full interview as she was nervous and asked for the interview to be stopped mid-way through the questions. The interviews took place in a meeting room that was part of the Research Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate. The researcher did not interview any middle managers that work in the same directorate as her, therefore ensuring that any potential conflict of interest was kept at a minimum. In the next section, the researcher discusses the middle managers' perspectives on strategy.

#### **4.4 A MIDDLE MANAGER'S PERSPECTIVE ON STRATEGY**

In this section, the researcher deals with aspects that are related to how strategy within a single government department was perceived by the middle managers working within that department. The study was carried out at an education department within the government context. The focus was threefold to investigate:

- how middle managers defined strategy;
- their perception on how strategy was crafted within the department; and
- their level of involvement in crafting the strategy.

In the section that follows, the researcher discusses how middle managers define strategy in their unique contexts.

##### **4.4.1 Strategy as defined by middle managers**

During the interview, the first question focused on how middle managers defined strategy. The question was asked after the researcher had established a rapport with all the participants.



After analysing the middle managers' responses to their perceptions regarding the definition of strategy, there were four common categories identified:

- (1) strategy was seen predominantly as a plan;
- (2) strategy was seen as process-driven which involves actions;
- (3) strategy involved a certain timeframe; and
- (4) strategy has a specific outcome.

During the coding process, the co-coder identified the categories of scope, design, method, time and arriving at a predetermined destination, in respect of the middle managers' understanding of strategy. As stated earlier, the co-coder is not a strategy subject specialist and used descriptors that she is familiar with in her own context. This implies differences in the descriptors used between the researcher and the co-coder. In all cases, the researcher considered the concept identified by the co-coder and not merely the word used. The researcher identified the appropriate words from the middle managers' feedback which best identifies their definition of strategy. In Table 7 below the researcher shows the extracts of the words of the middle managers and the alignment to the categories she identified. The numbers appearing in the third column align to a category. For example, 1 represents that strategy is a plan, and 2 represents that strategy is process-driven.

**Table 7: Extracts on the participants' response to definition of strategy**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Key extracts identified in the definition of strategy</b>	<b>Alignment of the quotes to the identified categories</b> 1 = Plan 2 = Process-driven 3 = Timeframe 4 = Specific outcome
<b>1A</b>	it is a roadmap of how an organisation intends to achieve its strategic objectives.	2, 4
<b>3C</b>	it's an approach or a plan that the department crafts in order to ensure that the vision of the department is carried through that action or programme.	1, 2, 4
<b>5E</b>	it is like the tactics that you use to...in order to achieve a goal.	2, 4
<b>7G</b>	with the overall planning of the department where we have aims and objectives.	1, 2, 4
<b>8H</b>	in simple terms, a strategy, it's a way of doing things.	2
<b>11K</b>	is the plan that you developed to implement policy in the most effective way	1, 4
<b>12L</b>	we want to achieve certain objectives and we have to devise a way in which to get there or to achieve those objectives.	2, 4
<b>13M</b>	a plan of executing your actions and addressing requirements as put in the constitution.	1, 3, 4
<b>14N</b>	it's the big plan of how do we...are we going to achieve all these things in a long term?	1, 3, 4
<b>15O</b>	it's a plan on how you are going to do things, how you are going to achieve the outcomes that are set in the department, who will be responsible	1, 2, 4
<b>16P</b>	it's a high-level sort of a guide on things to be done in the department but on the high level	2
<b>17Q</b>	refers to the plan and the approach by the department towards achieving its short- and medium-term goals.	1, 3, 4
<b>18R</b>	is that which is going to give us guidance, it's going to give us direction as to what we need to do, how we need to do that, and by when are we supposed to do that?	2, 4
<b>19S</b>	Strategy could be described as a high-level plan that is devised to achieve a certain output, to achieve a certain deliverable	1, 3, 4

**Source: Author**

In terms of Table 7 the most common descriptor within these verbatim quotes, by seven of the participants, deals with the fact that they see strategy as being a plan. The second category that the middle managers focused on is that strategy is a process. Thus, the data revealed that the participants emphasise that strategy is a way of doing things and is seen as being process-driven which involves actions. The actions and activities are

undertaken to reach the goals, objectives and policies of the government department. The definition of strategy is similar to that appearing in the literature review in that the consequence of strategy are outcomes, designated purposes, goals and deliberate outcome (Amason; 2011:9; Güney & Taylor, 2009; Sloan, 2014:10; Thompson & Martin; 2010:9).

Participant 14N elaborated that strategy is a plan to achieve the long term goals. Participant 17Q, who does data analysis and assessment, saw strategy as a way of achieving short- and medium-term goals.

The descriptions from all the middle managers thus suggest that strategy has an outcome or designated purpose and timeframe. The majority of the middle managers identified strategy as leading to an outcome. The participants spoke about “reaching a certain deliverable” or “about ensuring that your objectives are met in the timeframes given”. The verbatim words of Participant 19S and 15O further elaborate on the fact that the middle managers see strategy as having an outcome.

Additionally, the majority of the middle managers described strategy in terms of strategic objectives, vision, aims, policy, outputs and deliverables, which can be interpreted as indicating a designated outcome. Thus, the findings indicate that strategy can be seen as giving guidance on what needs to be done as documented by most of the middle managers. This is aligned to the fact that the process of strategy highlights how the strategy emerges and there is the understanding of a sequence of events (Chia & MacKay, 2007:220; Pettigrew, 1992:9–11). This section identified the middle managers perceptions of strategy.

#### **4.4.2 The crafting of strategy**

In this section the researcher offers a discussion on how strategy is crafted as described by the middle managers. In Chapter 2, the literature revealed that strategy is either formulated in a deliberate or emergent way. Mintzberg (1987:67–68) elaborates that, generally, people see strategy as a plan (deliberate) and, without an organisation knowing, they would have patterns of actions to achieve the strategy (emergent). In terms of deliberate strategy, it leads back to the fact that one thinks and then acts. This is similar to formulating and then implementing strategy (Mintzberg, 1987:68).

After analysing the middle managers’ responses to how the strategy is crafted in the government department, the categories that were identified are shown below:

- (1) the crafting of the strategy was done by a process;
- (2) the crafting of the strategy was linked to planning;
- (3) the crafting of the strategy was linked to timeframes; and
- (4) the crafting of the strategy was linked to outcomes.

During the coding process, the co-coder identified the categories of dynamic, preparations towards engagement, identifying obstacles and strategy being crafted at macro level, are then broken down to the micro level in respect of how strategy is crafted at the government department. The researcher identified four categories that are shown Table 8 below. The categories of the co-coder appear as sub-categories in Table 8 below by the researcher. The researcher displayed the theme in the table below. The table is to be read from left to right starting with the theme, then the categories and the sub-categories. Each category has its own set of sub-categories.

**Table 8: Crafting of strategy in the government department**

Theme	Category	Sub-category
Crafting of strategy in the government department	Process	Top-down
		Bottom-up
		Dynamic
		Consultative
		Macro-level decisions implemented at micro level
	Plan	Planning documents
		Mandate
	Timeframes	One year
		Three years
		Five years
		30 years
	Outcome	Deliverables

**Source: Author**

The first category discussed in this section is that the crafting of the strategy is a process. The data revealed that the crafting of the strategy was seen both as a top down and bottom-up process. Participant 1A, who works in the internal audit section, provided feedback that the strategy is crafted at a workshop or a plenary session which is seen as a strategy practice and tool. At the sessions, the deliberate strategies are discussed. Participant 3C elaborated on this by stating that work comes from the senior officials in the government department, but also from the unit itself, thus suggesting the bottom-up

approach to the crafting of the strategy. Participant 18R supplement the notion that the strategy is a top-down process by the verbatim words shown below:

What we normally receive from the directorate is some feedback as to what has transpired from the macro level (D 12: REC004---18R - 12:5(3896:4526)).

Whilst the strategy, according to the evidence above, is mostly a top-down process, the strategy is crafted at the macro level and is implemented at the micro-level, according to Participant 18R, who works with gender equity issues. The middle manager explains the process in the excerpt below:

.....it's something that has already been decided upon and we just get it as a form of feedback and then we have to craft or develop what we think or how we think the directorate has to fit within the bigger picture (D 12: REC004---18R - 12:5(3896:4526)).

The excerpt above confirms that the middle manager conceptualises what actions need to be taken which covers the elements of a task in order to achieve the strategy as prescribed by Lê and Jarzabkowski (2015:456). In addition, the top-down and bottom-up process aligns to strategy implementation happening vertically and horizontally as was found by Sting and Loch (2016:1177–1193).

The second category discussed in this section is that the crafting of the strategy linked to a plan. The feedback from the middle managers depicts that the strategy emanates from policy and planning documents that already exist in the South African government. The planning and policy documents that guide the strategy, as pointed out by the participants, are the Constitution of South Africa, NDP, Five-year strategic plan, MTSF, the Manifesto of the Ruling Party, APP and the Directorate's Operational Plan. The documents discussed in this section also appear in the excerpts that are documented under the third category.

Participant 17Q indicated in the excerpt below how the MTSF is aligned to the Development Plan:

..... articulated in the department's medium-term strategic framework, which is aligned to broader mandates of the department, and that come from the National Development Plan and the broader mandates of the ruling party. So, in government, we sort of have a broad vision of government which then gets translated into the Education sector and the Education sector develops plans (D 11: REC011---17Q - 11:5(2542:3159)).

The third category that linked to the policy and planning documents are timelines that guide the deliverables of the outputs in government. The timelines range from one year to 30 years, for example, the medium-term strategy framework has a five-year timeframe. The excerpt below indicates the different timeframes required for the various strategies:

.....but also the department is normally guided by long-term plans, if it has long-term plans, and, in our case here in this department, [...] as well as the medium-term strategy framework which is a five-year document relating to what we, as Education, are supposed to implement in the next five years as part of delivering on the National Development Plan (D 2: Recording\_5----3C - 2:6 (2523:3424)).

And then, obviously, every time, in every five-year cycle or so, there are new directives or new strategic directions coming in or reinforcements of old strategic directions. So, just for instance, the coming in of the National Development Plan which has been very influential in strengthening our work or reinforcing or redirecting our work (D 6: REC008----11K - 6:6(6198:7322)).

The last category that emerged had to do with outcomes/deliverables of the strategy. The majority of the middle managers in their feedback provided words that depict an end result. The participants refer to goals and strategic objectives which need to be achieved. Participant 12L indicated that once the strategic objectives have been crafted, then the specific directorates would need to see how they achieve the specific strategic objectives of the department. This is further supported by the fact that Participant 17Q articulates that in government there is a broad vision which then gets translated into the department's plan. Participant 7G, who works in finance, spoke about the strategy being aligned to budget in order for it to be operational and functional.

The section shows that the strategy that was drawn up was deliberate because the strategy comprised the categories of process, plan, time and designated outcome. The development of the strategy at the selected government department was similar to the study by Mintzberg (1987). The planning documents can be seen as the umbrella strategy which, in this case, was developed by the ruling party of the country at the time of this research. The planning documents can be seen as a guideline for all government departments to implement. The selected government department then determines the specifics on what needs to be delivered, which could involve top management and middle management emanating from the deliberate strategy of the ruling party of the

country. The planning documents have been identified in the earlier discussions in this section. The guidelines can be defined as the deliberate strategy, and the specifics of how to implement the strategy leads to emergent strategy. In the study by Mintzberg (1987:70) he also referred to the guidelines as deliberate strategy and the specific on how to implement the strategy as emergent strategy. This is in line with the view of Mintzberg (1987:69) that a pure deliberate strategy prevents learning and thus emergent strategising occurs. In the next section, the researcher discusses the middle managers' involvement in developing the strategy.

#### **4.4.3 Middle managers' level of involvement in crafting strategy**

The sections above revealed the middle managers' understanding of strategy as taken from their descriptions and responses. This was followed by how the strategy is crafted in the government department. The middle managers were then requested to elaborate on how they were involved in the drawing up of the strategy. After analysing the middle managers' responses to how they are involved in the crafting of strategy in the government department, the categories that were identified are depicted below:

- (1) the middle managers were involved in crafting of the strategy to a limited extent;
- (2) the middle managers were involved in the crafting of strategy by aligning to the department's strategy; and
- (3) the middle managers were involved in the crafting of strategy by providing feedback and support.

During the coding process, the co-coder identified the categories of prioritise or crafting of an operational/work/action plan to guide implementation, to identify obstacles, deliberations and monitoring, reporting, updating and feedback on the middle managers' involvement in crafting the strategy. Table 9 below shows the categories and the sub-categories identified in the middle managers' involvement in the crafting of the strategy.

**Table 9: Involvement of the middle managers in crafting the strategy**

Theme	Category	Sub-category
Middle managers' involvement in crafting of the strategy	Crafting of strategy	Crafting of strategy
	Aligning to departmental strategy (sense-making and sense-giving)	Alignment by crafting policy
		Alignment to mandates
		Alignment by the use of operational plan
		Alignment by use of concept documents
		Planning documents
		Implementation plan
	Feedback and monitoring	Mandates
		Challenges
		Objectives

**Source: Author**

The first category that emerged showed that only two participants described their direct involvement in the crafting of the selected department's strategy. Participant 3C, who works in the Strategic Planning and Reporting directorate, provided the feedback below in terms of his involvement in the compilation of the strategy at the selected government department.

For example, when we were revising our strategic plan of the department, we were able to meet with each chief directorate in the department so that we can just make sure that we are trying ... we respond to the mandates of government as well as the long-term and the short plan of government. So my participation was when we were meeting those chief directorate [sic] and alerting them in terms of what they are expected to deliver on, based on those mandates, looking at what they had crafted as their plans going forward but also highlighting things that we feel that were not addressed in their documents, so my participation was that, but also being responsible for ensuring that the final document that we will call our department's plan or strategy (D 2: Recording\_5----3C – 2:7(3791:4541)).

The verbatim words of Participant 14N, who works at branch level, provides feedback on her involvement in the crafting of the department's strategy below:

So we took all these mandates and collated a document. It's strategic planning that did that. Now, we were at the stage where they were sharing it with us to say these are all the mandates as they split out. So we need to see how are they linked to our strategy? [I]s



there something that we have left behind? So that, when we get to the bigger strategic plan with all managers, we already starting with the planning, currently. So, yes, incidentally, we have just started now but we have not gone into the deeper because they are planning for the big one in January (D 9: 14N - 9:7 (4584:5203)).

Participant 19S looks at the vision and mission of the department, which is high-level strategising, and then aligns the directorates to the strategy.

The second category reveals that the majority of the middle managers' involvement of the crafting of the strategy is aligning to the department's strategy. The middle managers achieve this by drawing up policy documents and ensuring that the directorate's operational plan is linked to the department's strategy. Participant 7G indicated that she, as a middle manager, does not really get the full exposure in the crafting of the strategy, but rather comes into the picture once it has to be implemented. Similar sentiments were shared by 1A in that he only provides feedback on how his unit fits into the department's strategy. The excerpt below indicates the comments from Participants 1A and 7G regarding their involvement in crafting of the department's strategy:

The way we participated was just to give a feedback as to how our particular unit can feed into the departmental strategy but, in terms of how other units feed into the entire departmentalised strategy, we are not involved (D 1: REC007---1A - 1:7(3012:3235)

As middle management, you don't really get the full exposure where you are part of some of the decision-making. You basically almost on the last end where you are giving information and they say this has been decided and then this is how we going to go about doing it (D 4: Recording\_2---7G - 4:9 (4359:4623)).

One of the participants (8H), indicated that she has been involved in coming up with indicators of how stakeholders can improve their performance. The verbatim words of participant 19S below indicates how there is alignment to the strategic plans of the department.

As you said, in Education Department we work through the strategic planning unit. So the unit would actually look at the mission, the vision of the department, the constitution, the high-level mandate of the department, which is quality education for all [...] So we have to now look specifically at the deliverable of ensuring compliance and then say this is our approach in terms of the sub-directorate to ensure compliance with financial regulations, financial management requirements and Treasury regulations (D 13: REC009---19S - 13:4 (4545:5940)).

There is evidence in this section that the middle managers had to make sense of how they understood and interpreted government strategy for themselves and the lower and senior staff with whom they work. This is a critical role that the middle manager has to fulfil and it will be discussed throughout this chapter. This process can be seen as sense-making and sense-giving of the middle managers in a government department. The middle managers developed a framework of their own knowledge, the language to use and their own sense-making process in order to convince others to follow them in the implementation of the strategy (Balogun & Rouleau, 2011:972; Demir, 2015:S127; Filstad, 2014:6). The middle managers, in their verbatim words, provided evidence that their sense-making and sense-giving processes lead to their understanding of government strategy.

The third category that some of the middle managers provided in terms of crafting the strategy is that they provide feedback and monitoring of the strategy. As a middle manager, Participant 13M, specified that he would come up with draft documents that address a challenge that exists in education. Participant 14N elaborated that she looks at the mandates as a middle manager in order to gauge how it links to strategy.

Participant 17Q, who works with assessment and data analysis, in his feedback revealed that, on an annual basis, the directorate staff has to review the APP in terms of whether the work of the directorate is aligned to the MTSF. The APP guides the operational plan of the directorate. The directorate would have its own goals and report on targets and indicators that are related to the goals.

The codes indicate that the middle managers were mostly responsible for aspects associated with the implementation of the strategy as shown in Table 9 above.

#### **4.5 MIDDLE MANAGERS' ROLES IN STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION**

In the previous section the researcher highlighted the middle managers' perspective on the crafting of the strategy. The researcher then asked the middle managers to provide feedback on the roles and activities that they undertake with regard to strategy implementation. An interesting observation among middle managers were that they were more keen to talk about their roles than the specific activities that they were involved in when it came to strategy implementation.

In the section that follows the researcher thus discusses the middle managers' role with regard to strategy implementation. After analysing the middle managers' response to

their role in implementing the strategy, categories that were identified as shown in Table 10 are:

- (1) the middle manager provides a leadership and management role;
- (2) the middle manager provides an implementation role;
- (3) the middle manager provides a monitoring and support role; and
- (4) the middle manager provides an information sharing and communication role.

**Table 10: Roles of the middle manager with regard to strategy implementation**

Theme	Category	Sub-category
<b>Roles of the middle manager with regard to strategy implementation</b>	Leadership and management role	Manage staff
		Provide strategic leadership
		Work with staff in other directorates
		Involved in drawing up work plans of staff
		Provide training
		Project management
	Implementation role	Drawing up policy
		Drawing up implementation and management plan
		Implement mandates of government
		Involved in risk management
	Monitoring, reporting and supporting role	Provide support to higher ranking officials
		Alerting stakeholders to gaps and aligning to plan
		Budget monitoring
	Communication and Information sharing role	Translation of strategy
		Data analysis
		Report writing

**Source: Author**

The first category of the management and leadership role of the middle manager leads to effective strategy implementation as is depicted in the current body of knowledge (Chilanga et al., 2014:79; Jooste & Fourie, 2009:66; McConville, 2006:645; Salih & Doll, 2013:33). In line with this, one of the key roles that the middle managers undertook was the guiding and managing of junior staff members. The data revealed that the participants had staff reporting to them. Therefore, it can be assumed that these managers had to manage staff. In keeping with this role participant 1A indicated that he had to assist junior staff in order for them to do their work. The middle managers assisted

staff in drawing up their work plans. In addition, the middle managers were involved in sense-giving by translating the department's strategy for themselves, officials on lower ranks by the fact that the managers assessed the viability of proposed strategies (Salih & Doll, 2013:33).

Another role identified by the middle managers was a strategic leadership role. Participant 11K stated that the middle manager's role is to give strategic leadership for the implementation of key strategic objectives. This was depicted in the quotation below by the middle manager:

We also have a responsibility, for instance, to do a broad budgeting and also take certain priorities to the Education Department if, for instance, additional funding is required to drive a new policy directive and so, as a Education Department, we, from my perspective, have the obligation to make sure that we give the right strategic leadership for the Education Department to implement along the education key strategic objectives that they don't ... that they adhere to the key priorities (D 6: REC008----11K - 6:24(9184:9666)).

Participant 19S indicated that she provided strategic leadership, when she and the staff working with her looked at the strategy, and then broke it down into activities and performance indicators. The performance indicators were then utilised to benchmark the attainment of the strategy that the participant works with. In addition, Participant 11K indicated that she provides strategic direction for the stakeholders on how the policy implementation should unfold. The middle managers should be good leaders, build teams and promote teamwork in terms of their strategic leadership role as prescribed by Essop (2013:38). The middle manager thus unpacks the strategy that needs to be achieved. Participant 19S further explained this role in the excerpt below:

So what we will do, after we have developed the operational plan, then it will go into our work plans. What is my role in making sure that this is achieved as a supervisor? My role then is to supervise my two colleagues, but before I supervise them, we will plan together. We will plan together and say do you see your role here? Do you accept this role? [.....] (D 13: REC009---19S - 13:7(7142:9098)).

The data revealed that participants 18R and 19S played the role of providing training in areas such as financial management and other aspects. According to Carpenter and Jiang (2013:13) the training of staff assists with transferring knowledge between the different sections, thus middle managers play a crucial role in transferring knowledge between officials that they interact with on a daily basis.

Some of the middle managers indicated that they had to manage a number of projects as well as relationships with external stakeholders. The project management role that the middle managers dealt with was explained in the excerpts below:

..... was basically project management of a certain number of projects (D 6: REC008---11K - 6:31 (15707:15774)).

The way it is implemented is through the activities that we do, through the projects that we actually implement. We look at ... in projects that actually speak or contribute towards the strategic objective of that (D 7: REC005---12L - 7:5 (3972:4182)).

The second category, the implementation role of the middle manager, is widely recognised in the literature as an important role played by the middle manager (Mantere, 2008:305-307; Peris-Bonet et al., 2010:361; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990:232). As will be discussed in this section the middle managers were predominantly involved with strategy implementation. This is because they are the link between top management and lower level staff, as was prescribed by Rouleau et al. (2015:599).

The middle manager fulfils the implementation role by drawing up policy. Participant 11K was one of the middle managers who was involved in drawing up policy, which is linked to the National Development Plan, and he explained his role below.

As a middle manager, I've been called upon a lot to input into higher level decision-making and, for instance, in our department, if I can just use a [sic] example of the National Development Plan, we, as middle managers, have been requested to engage with the National Development Plan and rephrase our key performance deliverables which then gets translated into our directorate's strategic plan, in every year, as well as our own work plans. [...] (D 6: REC008---11K - 6:7(7654:8753)).

In the excerpt above the middle manager provided evidence that the middle manager assessed the viability of a proposed strategy. This is linked to sense-making. In addition, Participant 13M drew up implementation and management plans once he has engaged with the stakeholders with whom he works. The extract of the participant is shown below:

Once we have a common understanding, then we must come up with an approach how this is going to be approached, and this is part of the strategy and, once you've agreed on how this needs to be approached, then we can engage as into the implementation plan, which is now a management plan. [...] (D 8: REC010---13M - 8:8(9874:12212)).

Participant 1A, who works in internal audit, elaborated on how he strives to attain the directorate's objectives. In doing his job, he is able to identify risks that may arise, and which would prevent the department from attaining their deliverables. The participant elaborated on attaining the directorate objectives below:

Now, improving the operations to make sure that the department achieves its objectives in an efficient, economic, and effective way. And how do we do that? We'll look at various units, how do they do their own operations? And we analyse the risk areas and we evaluate the controls that they put in place and we give feedback as ... if you find gaps and you make recommendations as to how they can improve those controls to make sure that the risks are mitigated and their operations are improved (D 1: REC007---1A - 1:10(4994:5488)).

In addition, Participant 14N, who deals with planning issues in the branch, implemented strategy by aligning it to the planning documents of government. The excerpt below indicates how 14N aligns to the planning document:

Incidentally, we are busy, currently, preparing strategic plan for the department. So, right now, we are at the stage where we looking at availability of people and we were also taking mandates from various spectrum [sic] of ... or sector ... the sector mandates because some would be coming directly from Parliament, from Portfolio, from ministers, delivery agreement from, from the manifesto, from anywhere where we find that Education was (D 9: 14 N - 9:6) (4111:4559)).

Linked to the strategic plan, Participant 18R indicated how her work plan aligns to the programmes of the government department in achieving her implementation role:

Within my work plan ... overall, I am responsible to ensure that our sub-directorate functions well, effectively, but, within the sub-directorate, we have specific programmes and these programmes we have allocated ourselves responsibilities. Part of my responsibilities is ... in dealing with gender-based violence, we cannot focus ... on it from one angle (D 12: REC004---18R - 12:8 (7116:7494)).

From the interviews, it was revealed that monitoring and supporting is a role that the middle managers provide on a daily basis, which was discussed as the third category under this section. In Chapter 2 it was revealed that the success of the transition of strategy is based on the monitoring and control system according to Thompson and Martin (2010:11). The middle manager provides support to the supervisor, who is a director, in order to make sure that the directorate's activities are implemented. The

achievement of the directorate's objectives is linked to the strategy of the department. The middle manager would make the director aware of problems that are experienced on a daily basis as prescribed by Tippmann et al. (2013:1872).

In order to provide a monitoring and supporting role, the deliverables of the government department must be known. The words of Participant 13M are shown below which also emphasised the coordination role of the middle manager:

Everybody in the sector has a common understanding come implementation time. It's now for me to monitor and support now. That's my role. And then this monitoring and support is informed by policy formulation for ... for argument ... I've just chosen one example which is relevant for now because it's a burning issue [...] Then a policy is developed with the input of sister directorates: legal services which will look at the legal part of it, if we are in line, curriculum which will look at the curriculum part. So it ... the second role that I play is a coordination role to coordinate within the department on issues that relate to me (D 8: REC010----13M - 8:10 (13227:14153)).

In addition, Participant 3C spoke about the compilation of the work plans and having to report on performance on a quarterly basis. The extract of the middle manager links to the horizontal and vertical strategy implementation which was discussed in Chapter 2. The middle managers ensure that there are sufficient resources in order to implement the strategy as was prescribed by previous authors (Mantere, 2008:305–307; Peris-Bonet et al., 2010:361; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990:232;). The extract of the monitoring role explained by Participant 3C is shown below:

.....department will draft their operational plans, they will draft their work plans, and then, on a quarterly basis, performance is tracked to see whether we are really making inroads in terms of our goals, in terms of our strategic objectives as they are reflected in our strategic document, and so part of what we do is to actually see if there is progress to what we have set as targets, as our objectives (D 2: Recording\_5----3C - 2:8 (5074:5476)).

In order to provide a supporting role in strategy implementation, the data revealed that Participant 14N looks at reports that are sent to her. She then identifies shortcomings, gaps, and alerts the officials that have sent the reports to her so that the reports can be rectified. The verbatim words of Participant 14N are shown below:

So my role, specifically, would be not only to deal with them in terms of reporting ... planning and reporting but also to alert them if they go astray and also, again, to align our

strategy with the risk management because they cannot go separate ways. They always have to marry each other (D 9: 14N - 9:11 (6113:6400)).

A further instance of support in the quotations above is that Participant 3G referred to the importance of providing support and monitoring for the implementation of the strategy. The verbatim words of the middle manager are shown below,

.....they also monitor the department as a whole to see that it ... if it's correctly following the mandate or whatever that was included in the action plan or the NDP as well as its strategy (D 4: Recording\_2---7G - 4:16(7785:7979)).

The middle managers have to monitor the spending trends in their areas of work. The words of some of the participants are shown below:

So, if the budget is not correctly monitored ... because we have as well a section where we monitor the grants (D 4: Recording\_2---7G - 4:17 (7991:8348)).

We also have a responsibility, for instance, to do a broad budgeting and also take certain priorities to the National Treasury if, for instance, additional funding is required to drive a new policy directive and so, as an education department, we, from my perspective, have the obligation to make sure that we give the right strategic leadership (D 6: REC008----11K - 6:10(9184:9666)).

From the above discussion, it is evident that the monetary role, in terms of budgeting, is important, as it was identified as a task that is taken during strategy implementation (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008:282). This was confirmed by participants who mentioned that funds were needed to achieve the deliverables in the government department.

The last category to be discussed under this section is the communication and information-sharing role of the middle manager. In the literature review it was revealed that the translation of the strategic objectives of top management need to be communicated and translated because the middle managers are seen as creators, interpreters and communicators of strategy in their organisations (Peris-Bonet et al., 2010:361; Salih & Doll, 2013:36; Vaara & Whittington, 2012:308). This again links to the sense-making and sense-giving of the middle managers. The middle managers have provided descriptions of how they translate the strategy of the selected government department into objectives at directorate level. Some of the descriptions also appear in section 4.4.3.



Communication between the managers and the staff that they work with becomes essential. The middle manager provides feedback on how the policy should be implemented to the staff that works with them, as indicated by Participant 3H in the excerpt below:

Sometimes policy dictates to you that you should do A, B, C and D. And then one has to sometimes get a directive from the director to say this is what is supposed to be done and then you give advice as an expert in that area to say this is how things should be done (D 5: Recording\_3---8H - 5:12(8588:8855)).

In terms of the communication role of the middle manager, Participant 18R, who works with gender equity issues, needs to communicate to stakeholders should there be any barriers that arise in this respect.

Communication assists with the supporting role of Participant 17Q, who provides feedback on the planning documents that he works with and how it fits into the overall strategy of the department, as seen in the excerpt below:

.....think we all have to, on an annual basis, review our plans and see how they are aligned to the medium-term strategic framework. There's another document that also guides our section planning, which is the APP, the Annual Performance Plan. So the medium-term strategic framework is brought into an annual operational plans [sic] in the APP and, in that, our section has to sort of define its goals in relation to those targets and indicators indicated in the APP. So we do that on an annual basis (D 11: REC011---17 Q - 11:6(3448:3946)).

Participant 17Q emphasised that there needs to be a link between a directorate's strategy and how it fits into the overall strategy of the department. In view of this communication thereof is crucial.

The middle manager makes use of their sense-making and lived experiences in order to convince others to follow the decisions that they are making (Balogun & Rouleau, 2011:972; Samra-Fredericks, 2003:169). Information-sharing is therefore an important role. In the feedback received from participant 13M, the information role was highlighted, as he was involved in the drafting of legislation, which can be seen as ensuring that the strategy is implemented. The extract below highlights the information role:

It can be reporting. So what we do, we'll develop templates to guide Education Departments on what they need to report based on the strategy. Like, for instance, the plans, we will collect information on the plans, we analyse that information, we make

reports which we report against the strategic objectives of the department on a quarterly basis, and then we will also indicate, if ever we are reaching our target, we are achieving our target or not (D 14: Recording\_4-----150 - 14:9(6385:6826)).

Further, Participant 16R's role is described as data analysis, reporting and the dissemination of education data. This middle manager works with education statistics that appear in publications. The confirmation of the information role of the middle manager is shown in the verbatim feedback below:

I'm responsible for data analysis, reporting and dissemination. I usually work with Education statistics D 10: Recording\_6-----16P - 10:1(585:1313).

Apart from Participant 16P working with data, Participant 17Q also deals with large-scale data in order to deal with the analysis in relation to education. The information role that the middle manager undertakes will affect strategy implementation.

The data revealed that the middle managers are involved in a number of roles that draw on their sense-making and their lived experiences to get others to follow them. This could be attributed to the fact that 11 of the 14 participants interviewed had more than four years' experience as a middle manager. In terms of the management of staff, the trait of leadership and management was important. The middle manager manages the performance of the staff that report to them and assists the staff in drawing up the work plan, which is aligned to the department's strategy. Findings indicated that the middle manager further communicates the roles and responsibilities to the staff reporting to them. Some of the middle managers do their work as projects from start to finish.

The monitoring, supporting and reporting role of the middle manager in strategy implementation was a key focus of discussion as a role. The middle managers reiterated that they did not promote working in silos. The sharing of information and data analysis were important activities identified by the middle managers that aid in implementing the strategy of the government department. In the next section the researcher discusses the strategy tools as identified by the middle managers. The strategy tool assists the middle manager in fulfilling the roles with regard to strategy implementation.

#### **4.6 STRATEGY TOOLS IDENTIFIED BY MIDDLE MANAGERS**

During the interviews, the researcher asked the middle managers to provide descriptions of the tools that they use with regard to strategy implementation. After analysing the middle managers' responses to their perceptions regarding the strategy

tools, there were common references to equipment that the middle managers use in their daily activities. Although these office equipment items were described as tools by the participants, this section focuses on strategy tools. During the coding process, 'equipment' was removed and the researcher used the definition of strategy tools, as defined in Chapter 2, as a measure to inform the coding. In line with the use of the strategy tools, as appearing in the narrative above meetings, workshops and informal networks will be discussed in this section as it appears in Table 11 below.

**Table 11: Middle managers' use of strategy tools with regard to strategy implementation**

Theme	Category
Middle managers' use of strategy tools with regard to strategy implementation	Meetings
	Workshops and plenary sessions
	Informal networks

**Source: Author**

Meetings, workshops and plenary sessions were seen as platforms where one middle manager got a chance to liaise in person with the staff with which they work. The meetings permit the middle managers to be able to discuss barriers that prevent strategy implementation. Meetings and workshops have been identified as praxis according to Clarke and Hodgkinson (2007:247). Praxis was defined as all the work that incorporates strategy and all the work that is done inside the organisation which involves the crafting of the strategy (Whittington, 2006:628). The middle managers elaborated on the use of meetings in the extracts below:

...in meetings, that's where you get to see the reality of what is happening because sometimes people write and you misinterpret what they have written but, when we have meetings, then you are clear of whether this thing is achieved or not achieved or if we are moving behind or whatever. So, meetings are used a lot between ... not only between me and our managers, also between us and strategic planning as they are the ones who drive the strategic planning (D 9: 14 N - 9:14(7327:7802)).

Now, what is important now becomes the monitoring thereof. That is why we have regular meetings to check are we achieving the outputs? Are we achieving the objectives? Do we have to relook? Did we over ... let's say, did we over-target? Did we over-project beyond what we can? Do we have to revise the target? And so forth (D 13: REC009---19S - 13:7(7142:9098)).

In addition, Participant 1A spoke about having meetings or workshops with directorates in order to understand their work and to build trust. Further, Participant 1A spoke about the strategy being crafted at a workshop and plenary session in 4.4.2. Participant 3C indicated that meetings are used in order for the government to come up with standard and uniform indicators to measure the performance of education in the government context. The participant explains further below:

.....sub-committee on planning, monitoring and evaluation, trying to somehow standardise planning in the entire sector, it is working but not ... I would say not hundred per cent. We are not hundred per cent there yet D 2: Recording\_5----3C - 2:20(9651:10597)).

The meetings, as discussed above, were seen as strategy tools that are used to monitor and control strategy.

The networks and collaboration across directorates allow the middle managers to communicate across departments and sections. This is in view of the fact that the directorates cannot work in silos and are interdependent on each other. The informal networks allow the middle managers to alert stakeholders on their non-compliance or adherence to policy. It was envisaged that compliance to policy would then improve after communication of the identified gaps. The extracts on networks and informal communication are shown below:

.....one needs collaboration between the different directorates. One cannot work in silos and be able to achieve the objectives that it needs ... for example, in terms of digital content, I need to work with the ... directorate, because the books that they produce in print I turn them into digital (D 7: REC005----12L - 7:15(7236:7569)).

Participant 5E had to rely on people that he knows in order to get information on pension fund cases that are referred to him. This can be a challenge if the required information is not given to him.

The strategy tools discussed in this section allow the middle managers to implement the strategy of the education department. In the next section the researcher discusses the barriers to strategy implementation.

## 4.7 BARRIERS TO STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

During the interviews, the researcher asked the participants to provide their perceptions of the barriers that impede strategy implementation. After analysing the middle managers' responses, the categories that were identified appear in Table 12 below:

- (1) there are barriers linked to implementation;
- (2) there are barriers linked to the departments structure; and
- (3) there are barriers linked to resources.

**Table 12: Barriers to strategy implementation**

Theme	Category	Sub-category
<b>Barriers to strategy implementation</b>	Implementation barriers	Lack of understanding of work of government department
		Lack of monitoring and support
	Structural barriers	Lack of alignment
		Inter-governmental relationships
		Concurrent relationship
		Lack of buy-in
		Working in silos
	Resource barriers	Non-filling of vacant posts leading to capacity issues
		Lack of skilled personnel
		Lack of skill development
		Funding
		Competing priorities
		Lack of information
		Unrealistic timelines

**Source: Author**

In the literature review some of the important enablers of strategy were the availability of resources, for example financial and physical resources, leadership, the right technical experience, intellectual skills and teamwork (Allio, 2015:6; Jooste & Fourie, 2009:66; Smith & Mandela, 2011: 8). Lack of some of the enablers has been identified as barriers to strategy in Table 8 above.

The first category that will be discussed is the implementation barriers. Participant 13M pointed out that the public must have an understanding of the deliverables of the government department. If this understanding does not exist, it can be a barrier.

The general public understanding of what the Ministry is about or what role is about, they don't ... the general public doesn't have the same understanding as the one laid out in the law (D 8: REC010----13M - 8:22 (19290:20233)).

Some of the participants referred to the absence of monitoring and that the link between strategic activities can be barriers with regard to strategy implementation. As indicated by participants, when a policy is drawn up, a barrier can be the lack of support for and adherence to the policy. In addition to the above, the middle managers pointed out that one of the barriers to strategy implementation could be that the reporting lines are too bureaucratic. This means that the lines of approval are very long from the higher-ranking levels to the middle manager level for the policy.

I think the critical one ... and we'll come to budget but let me start with the approvals, that there's a bureaucratic system that one has to get approvals for the work that you want to do. So that can be an obstacle. It can be an enabler as well but, if the DG refuses or the minister refuses (D 11: REC011---17 Q - 11:17(7372:7976)).

In addition, the participants spoke about the lack of support and cooperation in implementing the strategy. Participant 150 elaborated on the constraints of a very bureaucratic system with lots of red tape below:

And the other one it's ... there is flexibility but not to some sort. There is ... even the bureaucratic line, it sometimes ... in other areas, it's too long that, even if ever you are looking at the target and the timeframes, it's not easy to achieve those timeframe [sic] because each and every thing need [sic] to be approved before it can reach ... depending on the people who needs [sic] to approve, their availability. So it's ... to some extent, create [sic] a challenge (D 14: Recording\_4-----150 - 14:18(9760:10219)).

The second category that was identified as a barrier to strategy is the structural issues that arise. In a government environment policies that are drawn up at one department need to be implemented at various levels within the government. The landscape of the government in South Africa was discussed in Chapters 1 and 3. Some of the problems with regard to concurrent functions are where a policy has to be implemented at two levels. There can be a problem in implementing some of the strategies at both levels if there is no agreement on how the policy or strategy needs to be implemented. The words of the participant are shown below:

.....of concurrent functions where you'll find that the departments of education have got a role that they have and there is an executive authority at that level which, sometimes,

it's not really working in agreement with the authority at a national level (D 2: Recording\_5---3C - 2:18 (8255:8517)).

In addition, Participant 17Q spoke about the policies being implemented at other government levels and mentioned that there was a lack of buy-in from lower level stakeholders, which can hamper strategy implementation in a government environment. The verbatim words of the middle manager are shown below:

.....we are working with an education sector that's highly complex and, to get things done, you need cooperation from several stakeholders. So, often, the policies that we have are very good, it's very structured, it's well-intended but we don't have the kind of take-up that you'd want from stakeholders lower down in the system and that can sometimes have an impact on how successful you are in terms of your operational plans that's stemming from the policy that you are implementing (D 11: REC011---17Q - 11:20 (8775:9518)).

Participant 19S provided feedback that a lack of direction can be a barrier if what needs to be implemented, is not known by the implementers, which translates into a lack of direction in the implementation process. Further, if there is a lack of buy-in from internal and external stakeholders in terms of what needs to be done, this can be a barrier, and one of the middle managers described it as follows:

We sit with an audit query. So sometimes getting their buy-in becomes a very, very big hassle. Some things that we call priorities, for them, sometimes they are not priorities. So, in our section also, you might find that the differences might even be with the managers. Not just outside Education, but even within the department itself we might differ (D 13: REC009---19S - 13:21 (16105:17113)).

The section above highlighted how poor understanding of strategy and ineffective communication of the strategy could cause a negative effect on the implementation of the strategy by other government departments (Jooste & Fourie, 2009:53–65).

Further, working in silos is a challenge. Participant 5E substantiated the importance of needing to work with other sections in order to resolve pension fund cases that are referred to him. The verbatim words of the middle manager are shown below:

.....to know the people that I can rely on to give me feedback on the information that I need in order to resolve the cases that come to our attention (D 3: REC006---5E - 3:13(9216:9376)).

In support of the working in silos discussed thus far, the words of Participant 14N are shown below:

.....again, also, to change the mind-set of people because sometimes people really think this old thing is the alpha and omega. So, it becomes very difficult if you have difficult people who don't really want to change. And the other thing would be your staff. If you don't have enough people capacity, then it becomes a problem (D 9: 14 N - 9:17(9097:9534)).

Participant 12L further elaborated that staff failing to work across directorates can be problematic. This means that the barrier that the participant was speaking about relates to the fact that the culture of the department must fit the strategy as is prescribed by Aswathappa and Reddy (2010:202). The verbatim words of the challenge he experiences in this respect are shown below:

You send documents and somebody doesn't read it because it feels like you are giving them more work or you are adding on to their work. So, it's that inter-directorate working together is, for me, is the most frustrating because, if I'm going to develop content, I need, for example, curriculum specialist to go through the content (D 7: REC005----12L - 7:24(9580:10218)).

The last category to be discussed is barriers that are linked to resources. According to Participant 11K, who works in curriculum, unfilled posts often lead to unequal workloads for the middle managers. When there is a lack of capacity in a section, according to Participant 11K, more responsibility would thus fall on the middle manager. The non-filling of posts therefore impacts on the workload of the middle manager. The participant further complained that, if a middle manager does not get feedback or support from management, it could lead to a problem in strategy implementation. The data discussed in the narrative above points to task conflict which can arise when there is misunderstanding of the strategy and the practitioners who have drawn up the strategy (Lê & Jarzabkowski, 2015:452). The verbatim words of the middle manager appear below:

The other big challenge is that there's no equal workload. There's not been a proper filling of other posts with people who could do the work equally well so that some of the work could be handed over properly (D 6: REC008----11K - 6:51(20642:20854)).

The induction of new staff, according to Participant 11K, can be a challenge when the middle managers still have to do the induction including their own work as well. This leads to role conflict. The words of the participant appear below:



.....too much responsibility left to middle managers to capacitate new in-comers.  
That's also then left on the plate of the middle manage (D 6: REC008----11K - 6:54(21130:21361)).

The middle manager needs to work with staff that has the right skills and if they do not possess the necessary right skills, it can be a barrier. Participant 5E revealed that if staff does not take their work seriously, this can be a barrier.

Most of the participants spoke about financial resource constraints, which are due to a lack of funding and budgeting practices. Participant 17Q highlighted that, if a priority or strategy can be declined by the higher-ranking staff, it would mean that there is no funding to achieve the deliverables. In terms of budget constraints, Participant 17Q indicated that one could only work with the budget that is available. Therefore, there needs to be alignment between funding/budgets and set goals. Participant 13M provided feedback on the barrier of funding below:

.....the challenge is resources where you have an activity that is informed by the strategy, but a particular Education Department is not able to implement and their reason is that they don't have the money to do it or they don't have the resources to do it, other than the money. That is a challenge (D 8: REC010----13M - 8:21(18676:19289)).

In addition, if there were competing priorities in departments, it can be a barrier. The words of the middle managers are shown below with regard to competing priorities:

Competing priorities becomes a very big issue. Then you have the issue of other that have their own mandates. As much as I've developed my own strategy and my own operational plan this side, the buy-in of others sometimes is not as good as we would like it to be. So sometimes they do not buy in to what we think is the way to go (D 13: REC009---19S - 13:20(15312:16104)).

In the narrative above the funding and budgeting constraints were discussed. In addition, Participant 13M provided feedback that the implementation of strategies within the department, that is done through legislation can be a barrier. There can be legal barriers on how to implement the legislation with regard to education stemming from the Constitution of South Africa. The words of the middle manager are shown below:

....has to be implemented through pieces of legislation. So, that's the second challenge because sometimes you are of the view that this has to happen this way and you've consulted but, just at implementation, you get legal challenges. Then you have to stop (D 8: REC010----13M - 8:21(18676:19289)).

The lack of information can be a barrier to strategy implementation. Participant 1A indicated that, if he does not get the right information, it is difficult to make credible recommendations and findings from an internal audit perspective. Participant 150 pointed out that the information received is used to draw up reports for the stakeholders that monitor their progress. If the information received is not reliable, this can be a challenge and it can be due to a lack of co-operation. The words of the middle managers are shown below:

.....the challenges that we experience as a unit regarding implementation of the strategies that, one, we sometimes don't get a full cooperation from the departmental staff because of how they view the internal audit. For now ... they still view internal audit as a police unit, not that we are also part of the same ship and, if it sinks, all of us will sink. That is one challenge. And, if we don't get enough information in terms of documents, it becomes difficult even for us to do a work that will give credible findings and recommendations (D 1: REC007---1A - 1:19(7448:7998)).

In addition to the words of the participant above, Participant 150 spoke about the lack of credible information, below:

..... And then the other thing it's lack of ... can I say credible information? Especially from stakeholders because, when you monitor, when you write reports, you depend on departments. Most of the time, they will give you different information which creates a problem when you have to analyse it. The other challenge is the tool itself (D 14: Recording\_4-----150 - 14:16(9021:9499)).

Participant 11K reiterated that constraints with regard to time can also be a barrier to strategy implementation as he indicated that there is too much to be done in a short space of time.

The barriers that were discussed in the last theme align to the fact that strategy can fail if there are inadequate information, communication systems and budget (Okanga & Drotskie, 2015:64; Thompson & Martin, 2010:11;). Further, the current study reaffirmed some of the barriers identified are similar to that already discussed in the literature review. The barriers discussed in the literature review are the lack of management accountability, instability of administrative leadership, a lack of details on key tasks and activities which leads to problems with strategy implementation (Isaac et al., 2014:74; The Presidency, 2014:4-20). The similar barriers identified in the current study deal with

lack of monitoring, skilled personnel, support, information, alignment and skill development which were discussed as sub-categories.

In the next section the researcher discusses the enabling practices of strategising.

#### 4.8 ENABLING PRACTICES IN STRATEGISING

Participants were asked which practices enabled them to overcome barriers that they encountered on a daily basis. After analysing the middle managers' responses to their enablers in overcoming barriers to strategy implementation, four categories that were identified are as they appear in Table 13:

- (1) there are enablers related to building informal networks/support systems and partnerships;
- (2) there are enablers linked to creative coping mechanisms;
- (3) there are enablers linked to access to resources; and
- (4) there are enablers linked to communication.

During the coding process, the co-coder identified categories with regard to enablers that the middle managers utilise in order to overcome barriers that arose. Some of the categories are creative coping, building partnerships, engaging people, networking, communication and support. The researcher used the codes of the co-coder because it was deemed appropriate for overcoming barriers to strategy implementation.

**Table 13: Enablers to overcome barriers to strategy implementation**

Theme	Category	Sub-category
<b>Enablers to overcome barriers to strategy implementation</b>	Building networks/support systems and partnerships	Formal and informal networks
		Meetings
		Partnerships
	Creative coping mechanisms	Innovative thinking
		Middle managers develop skills to cope
	Access to resources	Funding
		Processes or systems
		Information
	Communication	Engaging people
		Monitoring and support

**Source: Author**

The first sub-categories that will be discussed are enablers related to building informal networks/support system and partnerships. In many cases the middle managers made

use of formal and informal networks to solve barriers that arose. Participant 5E indicated that he would contact staff that with whom he works in the other departments that would assist him to resolve the queries that he has to solve. Participant 17Q, in her feedback to this question, pointed out that when barriers arose she engaged stakeholders at meetings and provided a report on her findings. Participant 17Q's verbatim words regarding meetings appear below:

We have regular Education meetings, we are often in teleconference, we often go to visit to check that they are on board with what was agreed to, that they are able to implement the programmes that are coming from our section. So ... and that ... and we get regular feedback and reports from them. So we use that as monitoring mechanisms to see that we are on track in our delivery (D 11: REC011---17 Q - 11:22(10035:10426)).

Participant 7G indicated that meetings were used to encourage staff to allocate their budget to the right line item. Participant 8H spoke about interdepartmental forums where information is shared as a medium that is used to overcome barriers that occur. Participant 17Q reiterated that meetings allow them to check on the progress of work done by the stakeholders. The extracts by the participants are shown below:

.....to have a workshop to understand, actually, all the various operations and asked them to develop their methodologies as to how do they do their work and we understand them better and we explain ourselves, who we are and what we stand for and, based on that understanding and building that level of trust, we believe that we can work hand in hand to make sure that we succeed (D 1: REC007---1A - 1:23 (9714:10142)).

.....and there are interdepartmental forums and other stakeholders, you talk to people who have been there (D 5: Recording\_3---8H - 5:23(11886:11988)).

Similarly, Participant 12L in his feedback explained that he uses partnerships and the private sector to deal with the barrier of the lack of funding. The participant explains further below:

So, in that way, I have circumvented the issue or the problem or the barrier of lack of funding. I could also look for partnerships in terms of the private sector. There's a lot of money out there. You could look for partnerships to say I want to develop A, B, C, D for our children and is it possible for you to sponsor? And they sponsor. So, there are some ... there are ways in which you can circumvent the issue of funding (D 7: REC005----12L - 7:26(10850:11271)).

The second category to be discussed relates to creative coping mechanisms. The middle managers used their leadership skills to overcome some of the barriers that arose. They were shown to be innovative and creative when overcoming barriers that arise. For example, a participant that had no funding to develop digital content would develop content for another unit thus tapping into their funding.

If the department appoints suitable personnel with the necessary skills, it assisted with strategy implementation. The appointment of the right staff assisted with overcoming unequal workloads and the work can be delegated. When staff was appointed with the right skills, engaging them could assist to prevent barriers from arising. The middle managers would be able to manage the officials with the right skills. The extract of the participants that supported the appointment of officials with the right skills are shown below:

.....get the right people in new positions (D 6: REC008----11K - 6:58(22871:23133)).

So, there are times when you come across a situation but you know you can't take a decision, it has to ... So, when you come across barriers and challenges, what you need to do, you need to learn a skill of how do you gather data? You need to learn to be able to get the data, put that data in a particular way in terms of a document and inform the system and let senior management assist you to deal with it (D 8: REC010----13M - 8:24(21560:22838)).

Furthermore, all the middle managers indicated that they were hands on and keen to engage in what strategy needs to be implemented. Participant 150 provided feedback that work sometimes needs to be reprioritised in order to achieve the desired results. The discussion in this category provides evidence that the middle managers make meaningful use of their sense-making and sense-giving in order to overcome barriers that arise. This is because the middle managers engaged officials with whom they work, with regard to what needs to be done.

The third enabler is the access to resources that were used to overcome the barriers that arose. Funding is seen as an enabler of strategy. Participant 7G therefore suggested that the budget process of the government department must be taken seriously and the budget projections must be realistic. The extract from the participant's interview is shown below:

.....if you can take budget process seriously ... because we have about three different processes that are happening during the year where we have the medium-term

expenditure framework, we give the managers the budget for three years where they must make the allocations and the projections on whatever items that they going to spend (D 4: Recording\_2---7G - 4:35 (13591:13965)).

Further adding to the quotation above, Participant 19S spoke about communicating the budget to the chief financial officers and National Treasury when barriers occur, thus they collaborate to find solutions. The narrative of the middle manager appears below:

That is why then we communicate to budget monitoring, we communicate to a CFO, we communicate to National Treasury and, most of the time, these things are resolved, when you do make sure that you follow through, because, sometimes, when it becomes too hectic, you might make agreements at a certain forum that this is how we are going to resolve this budget area but, because you became too busy with the next thing, you might forget to follow through (D 13: REC009---19S - 13:22(17256:18046)).

In terms of the narrative above the middle managers can be seen as visionaries and corporate entrepreneurs (Döös et al., 2015:417; Radaelli & Sitton-kent, 2016:311–332; Rouleau et al., 2015:599).

Findings revealed that the middle managers used engaging processes and support systems to overcome the barriers that they faced with regard to strategy implementation.

The fourth category discussed is communication as an enabler that are used to overcome barriers that arise with regard to strategy implementation. Participant 13M in his feedback indicated that the gathering of data is imperative for dealing with barriers that exist. The information that was shared informed the higher-ranking staff to make decisions that would assist with alleviating the barriers.

In terms of communication, Participant 12L indicated that the way one interacts with staff would make them be helpful in dealing with barriers that arise. Participant 17Q spoke about the fact that the most successful programmes that he dealt with are due to having a good working relationship with the stakeholders. This was further backed by the words of Participant 18R who engaged with staff that she works with to deal with barriers that arose:

I've learnt that it's more about engaging people that actually sometimes assists you, engaging people on what needs to be done and how that needs to be done. Sometimes it helps. It is not the right way of doing it, but because of trying to push your agenda, you always try and short-circuit at times because then you need people that would be your foot soldiers (D 12: REC004---18R - 12:20(13911:14755)).

Participant 3C reiterated that the current reporting formats in government are used to overcome barriers as information is reported on, on a quarterly and annual basis in the government department. The government department has a performance indicator that shows the progress towards the attainment of an activity/priority. The middle manager also compiles a submission to alert the higher-ranking staff of the barriers that exist in the government department. Participant 5E provides feedback on alerting higher-ranking officials to the barriers that exist below:

.....my job description, like I tell you, I have to compile submissions with regard to the cases, update the minister and DG with regard to the queries, I have to update the minister and the DG on a regular basis (D 3: REC006----5E - 3:7(5666:5889)).

The middle managers reprioritised their workloads in order to attain the strategy. This was explained by the middle manager below:

..... we agree, as a directorate, to say now that there's no fund ... you'll reprioritise the activities. However, at the end of the day, you would find that achievement, even though it can be higher than expect ... even though it can be higher but it's now what one would (D 14: Recording\_4-----150 - 14:21(11447:12064)).

In the next section the researcher discusses how monitoring and support elements are utilised to overcome barriers that arise.

Participant 19S spoke about bringing staff together so that the barriers that arose can be discussed and solutions can be found to overcome the barrier. Participant 17Q further elaborated that meetings are used in order to track service delivery and the implementation of education programmes. The meetings provided support to the staff with whom the middle managers work. One of the middle managers engages staff that he works with on what needs to be done and how. The extract by the participant appears below:

..... that we agree, as a directorate, to say now that there's no fund ... you'll reprioritise the activities. However, at the end of the day, you would find that achievement, even though it can be higher than expect ... even though it can be higher, but it's now what one would expect, most of the time (D 14: Recording\_4-----150 - 14:21(11447:12064)).

The discussions above revealed that the middle managers engaged staff by building partnerships, engaging people and networking in order to overcome the barriers that arose. This highlights the importance of communication as a key trait that the middle

manager must possess in order to deal with the challenges that arise. The middle manager has to share their workload with staff that works with them in order to ensure that the challenges and barriers can be averted.

In terms of funding, the data revealed that the middle managers would engage staff to take budgeting and costing seriously in order to ensure that there is alignment to spending. This means that priorities and strategy are costed realistically to avoid possible overspending.

Findings discussed in this section point to the middle manager making use of sense-making and lived experiences to deal with barriers that they encounter. The middle managers engaged officials on what needed to be done and this means that they can use their knowledge of a situation in order to convince others to follow them (Balogun & Rouleau, 2011:972). This was done by the middle managers having influential conversations with their peers and sharing positive emotions from their lived experiences with the officials that work with them (Balogun & Rouleau, 2011:973; Huy, 2011:1403). Thus, the study documents the important role that the middle manager plays with regard to strategy implementation.

#### **4.9 SUGGESTIONS BY MIDDLE MANAGERS ON HOW TO IMPROVE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION**

The last question asked was that the middle managers provide suggestions on how to improve implementation of the strategy in the selected government department. After analysing the middle managers' responses to their advice on how the crafting of the strategy and implementation can be improved, categories that were identified are as shown in Table 14:

- (1) the middle managers' proposed changes to the availability of resources;
- (2) the middle managers' proposed changes in respect of effective interpersonal relationship; and
- (3) the middle managers' proposed changes in respect of communication and information.

During the coding process, the co-coder identified categories of breaking down the silo effect through effective interpersonal relationships, standardised uptake, access to information and communication at the grass roots level, as proposed changes to the current practice of strategy implementation. The researcher used most of the codes of



the co-coder because it was deemed appropriate to discuss proposed changes to current practices of crafting and implementation of the strategy. **The** categories that were identified are shown in Table 14 below.

**Table 14: Proposed changes to current practices of crafting and implementation of the strategy**

Theme	Category	Sub-category
Proposed changes to current practices of crafting and implementing strategy	Availability of resources	Funding
		Access to data
	Effective interpersonal relationships	Innovative
		Provide feedback
		Involvement in crafting strategy
		Mentor staff
	Communication and information	Breaking down silo effect
		Standard operating procedures
		Risk management
		Realistic goals
		Field work

**Source: Author**

The first category to be discussed as depicted in Table 14 is proposed changes to availability of resources. Funding was identified as a challenge that the middle managers encounter. The changes that Participant 7G proposed are that all the plans that deal with strategy must be linked to the budget. Whilst this exists in government, there should be strengthening of the link between the financial and non-financial outputs in the government. The staff working with financial management in the selected government department must scrutinise the budget and reprioritise activities that are linked to funding as proposed by Participant 7G. Further Participant 7G spoke about the fact that priorities that are not important can be done away with and the funding can be channelled to other priorities. The process of reprioritisation leads to inefficiencies in the system been identified. The reprioritisation of spending would assist in dealing with barriers in the government department.

Participant 3C further elaborated that voted funds must be spent on the objectives of government. Participant 3C recommended that during a strategy session the reinforcement of the linking of the budget to strategy must be done. In addition, the

feedbacks of the participants are shown below that supports the proposals put forward for changes to the funding practices.

If we can have that culture where we seriously scrutinise the budget ... not to say because you had two hundred and you think that you still want the two hundred, I'm not saying that you must not have that, but, if we can prioritise and look at whatever is important at the current stage and try and do away with whatever we don't need, then we'll be able to manage the department effectively (D 4: Recording\_2---7G - 4:41(16054:16443)).

So, in other words, we need to look at what are the strategic objectives? And then you get the voted funds. The voted funds must go to those strategic objectives. Anything else that can then can be funded by other funds [...] So, for me, the process of budget and the process of strategic planning needs to go hand in hand (D 7: REC005----12L - 7:28(12121:12861)).

If ever a strategy can be crafted in such a way that each and every activity it's costed from the beginning to the last, so it will also assist and all the tools are ... when I say it's costed, you will indicate the human resources that is required, you will indicate the tools that are required, the timeframes and, again, the people who are responsible and even the stakeholders that you need to meet because sometimes you've got a strategy that is not known (D 14: Recording\_4-----150 - 14:22(12566:13745)).

The core curriculum activities are critical and must be funded, thus some participants stated that budgeting and strategic planning need to be strengthened.

The second category to be discussed as depicted in Table 14 is proposed changes to effective interpersonal relationships. When there are budget shortages, the middle manager can deal with it by being innovative. The middle manager should also be the project manager on some strategies from inception until it is implemented as per the recommendation of Participant 11K. Middle managers should be advised to think outside the box and be critical thinkers as advised by 13M. They should not be stifled. Thus, they are treated as being competent in their field of expertise.

The words of Participant 1A suggested that the middle managers need to be more involved in crafting of the strategy as they are the implementers thereof. The verbatim words of the middle manager are shown below:

People who are going to implement a strategy should own it. So, they should believe that this is gonna work and, if you look at the departmental strategy, deputy directors or middle managers are the implementers of the departmental strategy and I believe that the senior

managers, they operate at a strategic level, but in terms of crafting the strategy there, the middle managers are not involved and, once they don't have that sense of ownership, it becomes a gap, it becomes a challenge now, because they are implementing something that they don't own in the first place (D 1: REC007---1A - 1:25(10839:11413)).

In section 4.8 the middle managers spoke about how they engaged officials to overcome barriers that arose and the fact that they were hands on in implementing the strategy. The importance of communication of information with regard to strategy implementation was seen as a way to deal with barriers to strategy implementation. This therefore further strengthens the fact that the middle manager should be involved in crafting the strategy. The third category to be discussed as depicted in Table 14 is proposed changes to communication and information. Participant 14N advocated that the work that directorates do must be known so that directorates do not work in silos. The verbatim words of the middle manager are shown below:

I think the main thing that ... something that I think that we should consider doing is to have this alignment of plans whereby we don't work so much in silos because you ... we know, as a department, we ... as a Education department, you are policy-makers and you have to monitor the policy (D 9: 14 N - 9:20 - (10927:11263)).

In addition Participant 19S spoke about more consultation and time for priorities to be implemented. The middle manager elaborated on this further below:

So sometimes people become ... feel overwhelmed by Education Department because we don't take much time to consult. For me, I think I would consult more and give more time for priorities to be adopted and, when they are fully adopted and we are sure about how to carry them forward, it's only then that we would implement (D 13: REC009---19S - 13:26(21460:21762)).

Participant 8H indicated that policies that are drawn up should be supported with a lot of research. Furthermore, the decisions that are taken must be shared with all staff according to Participant 18R. The middle manager elaborated further below:

For instance, I would want to see a lot of involvement or a lot of ... maybe not a lot, but some form of consultation from ... then ... let me say it this way. In an ideal situation, before the micro [sic] decides, they supposed to have received the inputs from us and even lower than myself, about how do we see the department moving forward and what it is that we want to see within the department? That kind of communication, if I may put it that way, this is what I think it's lacking and that is what I would want to see. Now, those

inputs have gone, from us, there. When they come back again, let them come back in a process that would also allow for engagement, not coming back as something that it's a done deal because I believe I interact much more [sic] better than the people that we are supposed to give service to. So, in that instance or in that context, I would consider myself as much more experienced than somebody who always sits in meetings (D 12: REC004--18R - 12:22(15244:16225)).

Whilst the strategies have indicators linked to them, one of the participants promoted that this should happen across government so that the progress of the strategy can be tracked. The fact that sections must engage with one another was documented earlier on. However, most of the participants stressed that sections should not work in silos and the work that they do should be known across directorates. The participants also stressed that the middle managers should engage in fieldwork away from their desk. This would promote collaboration, thus leading to better service delivery. The standard operating procedure which exists can be used to assist to show how things are done, so when the middle manager leaves, the next person would know what to do. The standard operating procedure will assist the incoming managers to know the processes that were used in order for an activity to be carried out. The standard operating procedure is more in depth than a work plan. The verbatim words of Participant 17Q are shown below:

.....not something so much of changing, but it's something that we don't do enough of which we starting to do, and I think it's coming from higher up as well as ... even as high as the director general, is to document our standard operating processes and procedures so that we have standardised take-up of what needs to be done in the unit and in the broader directorate. So that, if someone else comes in, there is not only a warm body but there is some document that says that this is how the processes are followed in this particular aspect of work. So further documents. I think the word is standard operating manuals that can be sort of a dummy guide, an A to Z, of what we do in the unit (D 11: REC011---17 Q - 11:23(10946:11633)).

The middle managers interviewed proposed that sections should not work in silos and this can be improved through effective interpersonal relationships. The strengthening of the budget process is proposed, as this is the backbone to achieving the strategies in government. Whilst the standard operating procedure exists, it was proposed that it be strengthened so that staff coming into this post has manuals on what needs to be done.

The middle managers also proposed that they be more involved in the crafting of the strategy of the government.

#### **4.10 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The table below shows the high level findings of each theme and how it assisted in answering the sub-questions of the research. The detailed discussion of the high level findings and the linking to the literature will be discussed in Chapter 5.

**Table 15: Summary of findings**

Sub-questions	Themes	Summary of findings
What are the roles and activities that the middle manager undertakes with regard to strategy implementation?	Roles of the middle manager with regard to strategy implementation	The middle managers were keen to talk about the roles that they undertake regarding strategy as opposed to the activities. The middle managers fulfilled eight key roles with regard to strategy implementation: which included a leadership role, management role, implementation role, monitoring role, reporting role, supporting role, communication role and information role. Further strategy implementation as a lived experience allowed participants to provide guidance on how the lower level staff work should be done. The middle managers used sense-making and sense-giving in this respect.
	Middle managers' understanding of strategy	Overall, the middle managers understood strategy to have categories of process, timeframe, plan and specific outcome.
	Crafting of the strategy in the government department	The categories that the middle managers identified in crafting were process, timeframe, plan and specific outcome. There are early signs of the strategy also been emergent once the planning documents of government have to be implemented at a directorate level.
	Involvement of the middle managers in crafting the strategy	The middle managers were mainly involved in implementing the strategy as opposed to crafting the strategy.
What are the tools that the middle manager uses with regard to strategy implementation?	Middle managers' use of strategy tools with regard to strategy implementation	Meeting, workshops, plenary sessions and informal networks are tools that assisted the middle manager in strategy implementation.
How do middle managers deal with barriers that arise during strategy implementation?	Barriers to strategy implementation	There were a number of barriers that the middle managers identified which are lack of understanding of government work, lack of monitoring and support, lack of skilled personnel, lack of skill development, lack of funding and lack of information. In addition, there are barriers that are inter-governmental relations, concurrent functions, working in silos, competing priorities and unrealistic timelines.
	Enablers to overcome barriers to strategy implementation	Middle managers were often creative in overcoming the barriers and had various tactics to do this. The middle managers again drew on their lived experiences, sense-making and sense-giving to overcome the challenges that arose. Further, the enablers of building informal networks/support system and partnerships, creative coping mechanisms, access to resources and effective communication helped

Sub-questions	Themes	Summary of findings
		the middle managers overcome the challenges that arose.
	Proposed changes to current practices of crafting and implementing strategy	The middle managers proposed that there should be changes in respect of availability of resources, the need for effective interpersonal relationships and the need to engage in communication and information sharing.

**Source: Author**

#### **4.11 CHAPTER CONCLUSION**

In this chapter the researcher presented the main findings of this study and used verbatim quotes from the participants to support the findings. The findings were presented within the framework of strategy-as-practice perspective which was used to explore the strategy implementation of the practitioner, who is the middle manager and how praxis and practices interconnected. A total of 14 participants were interviewed during the current study and in this chapter the researcher presented their descriptions of their understanding of strategy, how strategy is crafted and their involvement therein in the selected government department. By describing their involvement in the crafting of the strategy, the finding is that they are more involved in the implementing of strategy, instead of crafting it.

The middle managers fulfilled eight key roles in implementation of the strategy. The roles are leadership, management, implementation, monitoring, reporting, supporting, communication and information role. In the selected government department the middle managers were accustomed to many barriers that occurred on a daily basis. In overcoming the barriers to strategy implementation the middle managers focused on building informal networks/support system and partnerships, creative coping mechanisms, access to resources and communication as enabling practices to strategising. Meeting, workshops, plenary sessions and informal networks are strategy tools which were discussed in detail with the middle managers focusing on how the tools are used in strategy implementation.

In the next chapter, the researcher discusses the research conclusions and the recommendations.

## **5. RESEARCH CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

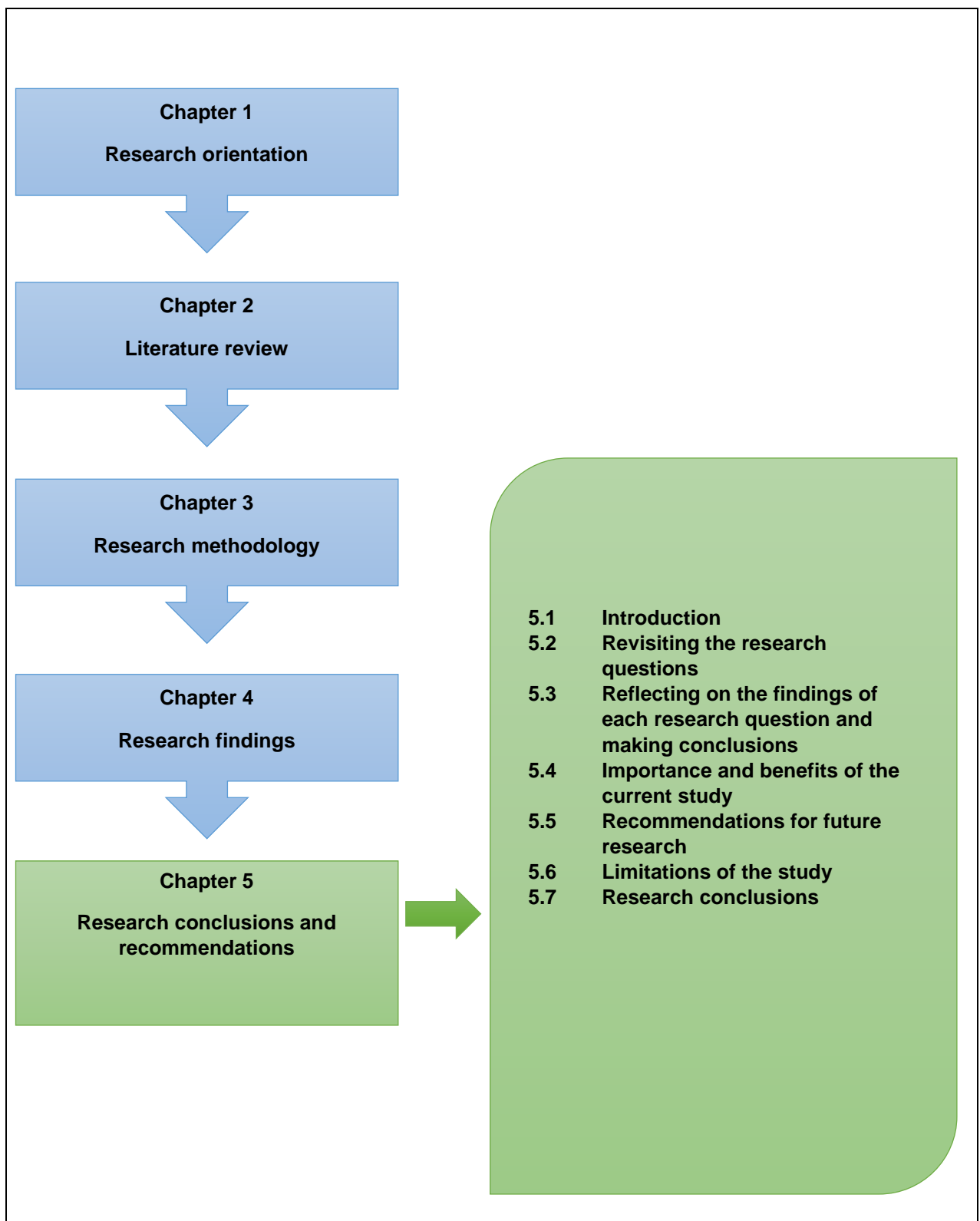
In the first four chapters of this dissertation the researcher covered the research orientation, literature study and the methodology followed to obtain the data and findings. In Chapter 5 the researcher revisits the research questions and presents the research conclusions and recommendations. The aim of the current study was to explore how a purposely selected sample of middle managers implements the deliberate strategy in the selected government department.

The strategy-as-practice perspective, which includes the elements of practices, praxis and practitioners, was used to explore how strategy was implementation from a middle-management perspective. The current study was positioned within Domain A (individual practitioners and micro-praxis) and Domain B (individual actors and meso-praxis), in a South African government context focusing on the individual actor and how they shape the strategy of the organisation. The current study addresses the gap of limited knowledge on how the middle managers implement strategy in a government department in South Africa. The intention of the findings was to add to the body of knowledge of the middle management perspective by utilising the strategy-as-practice perspective to study strategy implementation in a government environment in South Africa.

This study was a qualitative single-case study which drew on semi-structured interviews of 14 practitioners based in a government department. The data was analysed using thematic analysis. At the time of the current study at the government department, it was mid-way through the electoral cycle (2014–2019) and the third and fourth quarters of the 2016/17 financial year.

The sections that follow discuss the research conclusions and recommendations in relation to sub-questions and the central question of the current study. The layout of the current chapter and the dissertation is shown in Figure 14 below.





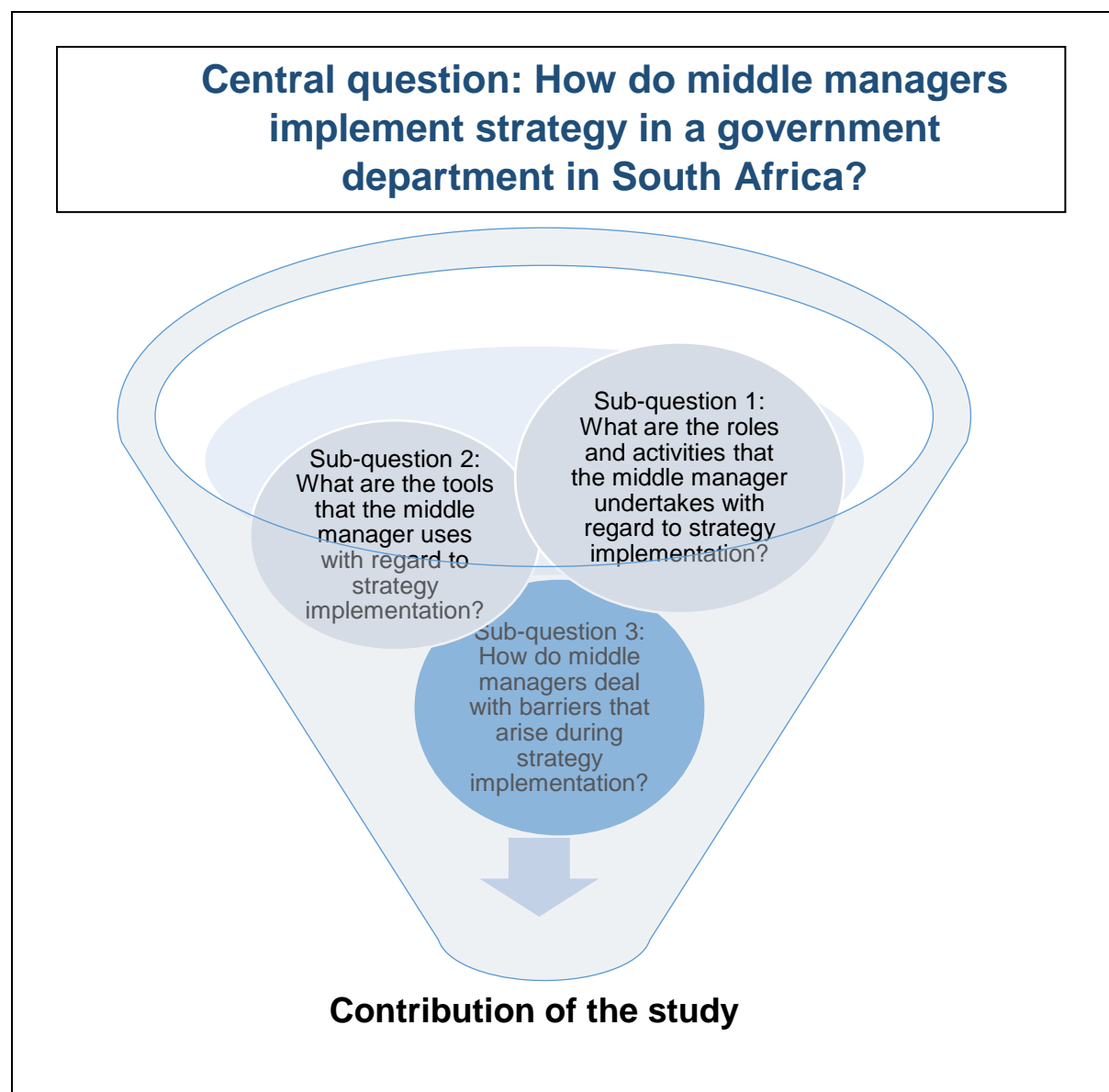
**Figure 14: Structure of Chapter 5**

**Source: Author**

The researcher starts the chapter by revisiting and reflecting on the findings of the research questions.

## 5.2 REVISITING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The central research question and sub-questions for the current study are shown below. The aim was to explore how a middle manager implements deliberate strategy in a government department in South Africa. The central and sub-research questions are shown in Figure 15 below.



**Figure 15: Revisiting the research questions**

**Source: Author**

The previous chapter discussed the findings of the data which answered the three sub-questions. In Table 16 below the researcher shows the link between the sub-questions and Chapters 2 and 4.

**Table 16: Linking sub-questions to the literature review and findings**

Sub-questions	Literature review (reference to sections in the chapters)	Findings (reference to selected sections in the chapters)	Main finding
What are the roles and activities that the middle manager undertakes with regard to strategy implementation?	2.4 (2.4.1–2.4.3)  2.7 (2.7.1–2.7.3)	4.4 (4.4.1–4.4.3)  4.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership and management role</li> <li>• Implementation role</li> <li>• Monitoring, reporting and supporting role</li> <li>• Communication and information-sharing role</li> <li>• Sense-making and sense-giving</li> </ul>
What are the tools that the middle manager uses with regard to strategy implementation?	2.6	4.6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings</li> <li>• Workshops and plenary sessions</li> <li>• Informal and formal networks</li> </ul>
How do middle managers deal with barriers that arise during strategy implementation?	2.5.2 2.5.3 2.5.4	4.7 4.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building informal networks/support system and partnerships</li> <li>• Creative coping mechanisms</li> <li>• Access to resources</li> <li>• Information sharing and engaging in communication</li> </ul>

**Source: Author**

Table 16 above shows that all the sub-questions were addressed in the current study. In the next section the researcher reflects on each sub-question in terms of the findings made in Chapter 4. This enabled the researcher to draw conclusions on the findings of each one of the sub-questions. The three sub-questions will then be used to answer the central research question.

### **5.3 REFLECTING ON THE FINDINGS OF EACH RESEARCH QUESTION AND DRAWING CONCLUSIONS**

The following sections will discuss the findings presented in Chapter 4 in relation to the sub-questions and central research question of the current study.

#### **5.3.1 Sub-question 1: What are the roles and activities that the middle manager undertakes with regard to strategy implementation?**

In order to answer the central question of the study which explored how strategy is implemented by middle managers in a government department, it was necessary to ask questions on how the strategy is crafted and implemented at the government department by the middle managers. The purpose of this section is to demonstrate how the findings answered the first sub-question.

In terms of the crafting of strategy the overarching findings are that the middle managers understood the definition of strategy and therefore were appropriately positioned to provide feedback on how the strategy was crafted at the government department.

Descriptions of how the strategy was crafted in the government department showed that the strategy was drawn up and involved deliberate, top-down and bottom-up decision-making processes. This aligns to the fact that top management takes the decisions that are implemented by middle managers in the current study (Andrews et al., 2011:646; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985:258; Sting & Loch, 2016:1177–1193). Further, the current study depicted that the strategy at the selected government department was a deliberate strategy, because it has intended consequences, it is characterised by central control and is goal-driven (Andrews et al., 2011:646; Mintzberg & Waters, 1985:258; Sting & Loch, 2016:1177–1193). There was evidence of this in the fact that the strategy of the government department needs to align to the NDP, MTSF and this was discussed in detail in section 4.4.2. The middle managers were mostly involved in implementing the strategy as opposed to crafting it

The planning documents are time-driven and have specified deliverables to be attained. The translation of the strategy appears in the selected department's Five year strategic plan, APP and the directorates work plan. Whilst these documents can be seen as a guideline for government when the education department identifies the specifics on what needs to be achieved, which in the current study was by the middle

manager, there are signs of emergent strategy. The middle manager had to translate the government strategy for the officials working with them. Furthermore, the current study confirmed that there is a limited participative role for the middle manager in crafting the strategy. The participating middle managers did recommend that they should be more involved in the crafting of strategy, so that they can take ownership of what needs to be delivered.

The rest of the section discusses the role that the middle manager undertakes with regard to strategy implementation. The findings indicated that the majority of the middle managers identified with their role instead of the activities that are undertaken with regard to strategy implementation. This may be interpreted to mean that the middle managers value their role as opposed to the activities they undertake with regard to strategy implementation. In addition, in Chapter 2 the important role of the middle manager with regard to strategy implementation was confirmed by Wooldridge and Floyd (1990:232), Mantere (2008:305–307) and Peris-Bonet et al. (2010:361).

Findings from the current study align to the view that the middle manager plays a vital leadership and management role through managing staff. The middle managers monitor activities and what needs to be done by lower level staff and the managers monitor the progress of the staff (Jooste & Fourie, 2009:66; Gilbert & Sutherland, 2013:5; Salih & Doll, 2013:33). For the current study, it was confirmed that middle managers in the selected case study organisation provided for alignment between strategic intentions and employee actions and activities (Salih & Doll, 2013:35). This was in view of the fact that the middle managers are involved in drawing up the work plans of the lower level staff that work with them. The middle managers were also seen as interpreters and communicators of the strategy within the government context. The middle managers in sections 4.4.3 and 4.5 spoke extensively about how the strategy is translated into actions and targets for each year at directorate level. The strategy was broken down to outcomes at directorate and levels below the middle manager level. This was in line with the roles identified by Vaara and Whittington (2012:308). The middle managers ensured that there were sufficient resources in order to implement the strategy (Mantere, 2008:305–307; Peris-Bonet et al., 2010:361; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990:232).

The middle managers translated the strategy of government for the lower-level staff at directorate level which translates to sense-making. For the current study, it was

established that middle managers in the selected case study organisation drew on their sense-making and lived experiences to accomplish this role, because they made use of their knowledge of a situation and their articulation thereof in order to convince others to follow the decisions that the managers were making (Balogun & Rouleau, 2011:972). In terms of their lived experiences, the middle managers attained the linkages between the micro and the macro-strategies which can cover the organisational life (Orlikowski, 2015:34; Samra-Fredericks, 2003:146). In section 4.5 the middle managers provided micro level detail of how they assist in translating the strategy for higher level and lower level officials working in the selected government department. In aligning the micro and macro-strategies of the government department, the current study confirmed that the middle managers were involved in aligning strategies vertically or horizontally between top management, lower management and officials from other departments (Rouleau et al., 2015:599; Sting & Loch, 2016:1177–1193).

In section 4.5 the middle managers drew up work plans which were monitored on a quarterly basis, and which assist them in strategy implementation. In addition, the middle managers monitored the progress of performance of their staff and provided support or took corrective action when the performance was below the required standard as is prescribed by Salih and Doll (2013:33). The middle managers monitored budget and spending which is seen as an enabler of strategy implementation (Aswathappa & Reddy, 2010:202; Katoma & Ungerer, 2011:41-45; Suarez et al., 2016). The monitoring, reporting and supporting roles of the middle managers aligned to the current body of knowledge which was confirmed by Rouleau et al. (2015:599–600).

Findings from the current study suggested that the communication and information-sharing role of the middle manager aligns with the view of Peris-Bonet et al. (2010:361) and Salih and Doll (2013:36). The middle managers provided feedback on planning documents and communicated with stakeholders if there were any barriers with which to deal. Some of the middle managers drew up policy or standard operating procedures that were linked to the government's planning documents. One of the main responsibilities identified by middle managers involved the aligning of the directorate's work to that of the government department. In terms of the information category, the middle managers do analysis of data and write reports in order to show the trends and

findings in education. The middle managers can draw on their sense-making and lived experiences. All the middle managers worked in their current posts for more than three years, and had officials reporting to them. They therefore had to convince the staff members who work for the managers to follow them once they make sense of the strategy in order to ensure that it can be implemented.

The aforementioned findings and sub-categories discussed in Chapter 4 confirmed that the role of the middle manager aligns to the literature review under sections 2.4 and 2.7.2. The middle managers occupy levels below the head of an organisation, and one or more levels above the staff that they supervise and draw on their leadership and management roles for implementing strategy (Al-Hakim & Hassan, 2011:952; Gilbert & Sutherland, 2013:5; Jansen van Rensburg et al., 2014:170; Marin, 2012:118). The assumption is that the middle manager can either delay or enable strategy implementation, and this aligns to the views of Salih and Doll (2013:33), Darkow (2015:2) and Katoma and Ungerer (2011:39–40). This is because the middle managers assist the lower level staff to draw up their work plans by translating the strategy into activities that need to be carried out. The middle managers strive to attain the directorate's objectives by aligning with the planning documents of government.

In the next section the researcher builds on the roles of the middle manager in terms of the strategy tools that the middle managers use with regard to strategy implementation.

### **5.3.2 Sub-question 2: What are the tools that the middle manager uses with regard to strategy implementation?**

In the previous chapter the researcher presented the findings on the roles of the middle manager with regard to strategy implementation. In this section the researcher provides reflections on the strategy tools that are used in strategy implementation by middle managers.

Findings indicated that the middle manager's description of the strategy tools aligns to the definition of management tools, which were financial, human, physical and information systems (Clark, 1997:421). In view of the fact that the current study was undertaken from a strategy-as-practice perspective, the strategy tools identified were those that are used for conveying information, problem-solving and dealing with personal differences (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015:539).

The strategy tools thus used by the middle managers were meetings, workshops, plenary sessions and informal networks. The meetings permitted the middle managers to be able to discuss barriers that prevent strategy implementation. The meetings or workshops assisted some middle managers to understand how other directorates work and to build trust. Informal networks allowed communication across departments and sections and alerted stakeholders to their non-compliance or non-adherence to policy. Findings indicated that these tools serve as boundary objects, because the tools promote communication and the sharing of ideas by different strategy actors, which aligns to the view of Spee and Jarzabkowski (2009:228). This is in line with the fact that the middle managers use the strategy tools to create a common language about strategy (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015:541).

### **5.3.3 Sub-question 3: How do middle managers deal with barriers that arise during strategy implementation?**

The purpose of this section is to demonstrate how the findings answered the sub-question with respect to how the middle managers dealt with barriers that arise on a daily basis. The current study identified resource barriers, implementation barriers and structural barriers that impede strategy implementation for some of the middle managers. This was discussed in detail in section 4.7.

The middle managers created enablers of strategy implementation that focused on the building informal networks/support system and partnerships of the government department. This allowed for meetings and workshops to take place. The findings from the current study align to the view of Aswathappa and Reddy (2010:202) that at the organisational level there must be an organisational structure and the corporate culture should fit the strategy. In a similar way, the middle managers used engagements at meetings to provide feedback on work done on particular deliverables or priorities, by staff or stakeholders that work with them. The meetings and the workshops have also been identified as strategy tools in section 5.3.2 above. The current study thus confirms that an organisation should strive to ensure that the different departments, units and individuals work together in order to pursue the goals of the organisation in order to overcome barriers as was prescribed by Carpenter and Jiang (2013:13).



The creative coping mechanisms of the middle managers align to the fact that the middle manager gives strategic direction to an organisation (Allio, 2015:6; Jooste & Fourie, 2009:66). The middle managers had to be innovative and creative in their thinking to overcome barriers that arose, because they are hands-on in the work to be done. The sense-making and lived experiences of the middle manager were used in this regard. In translating the government strategy, the middle managers spoke about prioritising and crafting operational, work or action plans, which mean that they had to convince the lower and senior level employees to agree to how this work should be done. The current study confirmed that the middle manager is the link between top management, lower management and officials from other directorates. In overcoming the barriers that arose, the middle managers made use of emergent strategies that are derived from daily activities of staff below management level, and this can be seen as bottom-up decision-making (Cardoso & Lavarda, 2011:3). The middle manager can advise what work needs to be reprioritised, sometimes in order to achieve the desired results.

In terms of resources, the current research findings supported the fact that access to information, budget, proper administrative systems and information are seen as enablers of strategy implementation (Aswathappa & Reddy, 2010:202; Katoma & Ungerer, 2011:41-45; Suarez et al., 2016). The middle managers used various communication skills to advise the higher ranking officials of the barriers that exist in the government environment. This aligns to the findings of Meissner and Radford (2015:788) that some of the skills that the middle manager must possess are customer service skills, leadership, conflict resolution, mentoring, flexibility, change management, time management and communication skills in the public sector.

In the next section the researcher answers the central research question.

#### **5.3.4 Answering the central research question**

**Central question: How do middle managers implement strategy in a government department in South Africa?**

After answering the sub-questions, the aim is now to answer the central question of the study: how do the middle managers implement strategy in a government department in South Africa? Table 16 shows the link between the sub-questions and

how it was used to answer the central question. In the table the researcher shows how the main findings fit into answering the central question.

Middle managers implement deliberate strategies in the selected government department by making sense of the strategy, translating it and communication of the government strategy. In doing this, the middle managers interviewed were, however, not predominantly involved in the crafting of the strategy, but rather in the implementing of the deliberate strategy. In implementing the strategy, the current study depicted the middle manager as fulfilling a leadership role, a management role, an implementation role, a supporting role, a monitoring role, a reporting role, a communication role and an information role. In fulfilling these roles, the middle managers made use of their sense-making, sense-giving and lived experiences in translating the deliberate strategy for the lower-level and senior-level staff. In addition, the middle managers would need to make use of strategy tools in order to implement strategy. The use of workshops, meetings, plenary session and formal and informal networks were used by the middle managers to implement the strategy at the selected government department. In executing the deliberate strategy, the translating, interpretation and implementation of the strategy led to the strategy becoming an emergent strategy by the middle managers. The middle managers were seen as visionaries and the link between top- and lower-level staff at the selected government department.

In implementing deliberate strategy the middle managers must take cognisance of the barriers that are related to structure, implementation and resources which can hamper strategy implementation. The barriers identified add to those identified in other studies in the African context. The literature review identified the barriers as being politically related, administrative, lack of management accountability, instability of administrative leadership, skills deficit, weakness in the organisational design and low staff morale, poor planning, inadequate funding, unmotivated staff and in some cases, the staff not being committed (Okanga & Drotskie, 2015:64; The Presidency, 2014:4-20). There were a number of barriers that the middle managers identified which are lack of understanding of government work, lack of monitoring and support, lack of skilled personnel, lack of skill development, lack of funding and lack of information. In addition, there are barriers that are related to inter-governmental relations, concurrent functions, working in silos, competing priorities and unrealistic timelines. The middle

managers were often creative in overcoming the barriers that they encountered and had various tactics to do this. They made use of networks, meetings, systems, resources and information enablers to do so.

The middle managers recommended changes to the current practices of strategising in a government context in that they should be more involved in the crafting of the strategy and not only come in at the implementation stage. The middle managers further identified that they should strengthen their critical thinking and promote the use of tacit knowledge or intuitional memory. In view of the budget constraints faced in government, the middle managers proposed that the current budget process should be strengthened in order for budgeting to be taken seriously across government. The reporting on strategies should be supported in terms of indicators and standard operating procedures for work being done, so that what needs to be done is known.

### **5.3.5 Recommendation and managerial implications**

This section discusses possible recommendations that management may take note of when crafting and implementing the strategy at the selected government department.

The case study offered substantial evidence that suggests that the middle managers should be more involved in the crafting of the high-level strategy of the selected government department. The middle manager acts as a buffer between top and lower level staff in the implementation of the strategy and thus operates at a functional and operational level. It is suggested that their involvement would improve the crafting of the strategy at the selected government department which would aid in the delivery of the strategy within the department.

The researcher recommends that strategy needs to be spoken about at the micro-level. This dialogue leads to the nitty-gritty activities that involve strategy work. When strategy is discussed at this level, senior management can gauge if the officials understand the strategy of the department and how they can promote the achievement of the strategy.

The barriers that the participants have identified should be taken note off. The barriers identified maybe currently hampering the achievement of some strategies in crucial areas of education within the selected government department. Chapter 4 highlights, the innovative actions that the middle managers undertake to overcome these barriers which may serve as best practices in tackling barriers that arise.

The next section reports on importance and the benefits of the current study.

#### **5.4 IMPORTANCE AND BENEFITS OF THE CURRENT STUDY**

The current study responded to the research agenda of the strategy-as-practice perspective, which proposes that middle managers needs to be studied in depth in terms of their practices and how this is linked to economic, social and environmental outcomes (Rouleau et al., 2015:609). Furthermore, it is widely known that most of the current studies that have utilised the strategy-as-practice perspective, and specifically focusing on the middle management perspective, have been done outside of the African context. The focus in most of these studies was on the private sector, with very few studies focusing on the public sector. Therefore, the current study is one of very few studies to be done on middle managers in South Africa and within an emerging economy, specifically focusing on the public sector. In addition, in the current study, the emphasis was on the middle manager in a government context instead of the private sector and therefore the study assists in filling the gap that exists of studies in a government context.

Such a study is important because government is responsible for the delivery of basic services in South Africa for example education. The benefit of focusing on a selected education department is due to the fact that education takes up almost a quarter of the budget of the country. The current study reiterated that it is recommended that the strategy-as-practice perspective can be used to study strategy in a government context. The study provided feedback on how the micro-activities of middle managers link to the macro-strategy of the government department under study. In the current study the high level planning documents were discussed which covered the NDP, MTSF, Five year strategic plan and APP. Therefore, the current study provides descriptions of how the actions of the middle managers translates the deliberate strategy into activities which lead to the implementation of the strategy. The study may therefore be useful in future to practitioners who implement strategy in a government department in South Africa.

#### **5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The use of the strategy-as-practice perspective is still fairly new in terms of studying middle managers. Whilst numerous studies still need to be undertaken, the researcher

proposes the four areas discussed below as recommendations for future research in the government context.

In Chapter 4, middle managers confirmed that workshops and meetings are used as tools in strategy implementation. Some of the participants recognised that the high level strategy of the selected government department was discussed at meetings or workshops. Studies have been done on these strategy tools in the private sector, however limited studies have been done with regards to strategy tools in the public sector. The researcher proposes that a study could be carried out to illustrate how meetings and workshops are used in the crafting and implementation of strategy in a government context. The assumption is that senior and middle managers at a government department could also use these tools to translate government strategy into work for lower level staff. Such a study would add to the various studies done on meetings and workshops being used as strategy tools.

A study could be done on the enablers that are used by the middle managers with regard to crafting and implementation of strategy in a government context. Such study may allow a contribution to be made to the body of knowledge in this respect. A number of enablers discussed in Chapter 2 only focused on strategy implementation. A further study could provide findings on whether middle managers use the same enablers in the development and implementation of government strategy.

A study could be done on how the sense-making and sense-giving practices of middle managers are used to overcome barriers to strategy implementation in a government context. In the current study, the middle managers provided evidence of sense-making and sense-giving in developing and implementing strategy at the selected government department. The way that the middle managers deal with the barriers that occur on a daily basis with regard to strategy will assist other researchers in determining discursive activities of the middle manager in strategic sense-making and sense-giving in a government context.

A simultaneous comparative study of middle managers in one government department and middle managers in a private sector firm utilising the strategy-as-practice perspective could be done to explore the middle managers strategising practices. The study could address the gap in determining whether the strategising practices of

middle managers in the private and government sector are similar. The study will further add to studies done on the African continent.

## **5.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This research could not be generalised to the findings of individuals, sites, or places outside of that of the study. This meant that generalisability cannot be applied here in the use of the findings of the study to similar studies. Furthermore, the transferability of a qualitative study may be problematic. Some of the disadvantages of case studies are that it provides little basis for scientific generalisation (Yin, 2009:15). However, the aim of the qualitative research was not to generalise, but it was rather to provide an in-depth account of the middle manager's perspective on the implementation of strategy in South Africa.

## **5.7 RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS**

In Chapter 1 of the dissertation, the researcher identified three areas where gaps existed, which prompted the study to be carried out.

Firstly, the current research sought to address the lack of research on how strategy is developed and implemented in a government department from a middle manager perspective. The study confirmed that the strategy that is developed in the government organisation was based on planning documents that already existed, which shows that the strategy was deliberate. However, most of the middle managers did not have much involvement in the crafting of the high level strategy, but played a fundamental role in implementing the strategy. The roles they had to fulfil were rather complex, and involved eight key roles: leadership role, management role, implementation role, monitoring role, reporting role, supporting role, communication role and information-sharing role. The current study reaffirmed that in the implementation of the government strategy at the selected department middle managers made use of their sense-making, sense-giving and lived experiences. In the current study, there were numerous descriptions of how the middle manager had to make sense of how they understood and interpreted government strategy for themselves, lower and senior officials within the selected government department. The interpretation of the high level strategy confirms that the middle manager is involved in vertical and horizontal strategy implementation. The current study further confirmed that there were signs of emergent strategy in implementing government strategy. The middle managers had

to interpret, engage officials and communicate the strategy. There were informal and unscripted activities that led to strategy implementation.

Secondly, the current study sought to address the lack of research on the strategy tools that middle managers utilise with regard to strategy implementation in a government department. The middle managers at the selected government department utilised workshops, meetings, plenary sessions and informal networks in strategy implementation. The workshops and meetings permitted the middle managers to discuss barriers to strategy and how to align their directorates work to the high level strategy of the government department. The workshops and meetings in addition was utilised to monitor, support and report on strategy implementation. Informal networks allowed communication across departments and sections and alerted stakeholders to their non-compliance or non-adherence to policy. In addition, some of the middle managers confirmed that these tools could also be utilised in the crafting of the government strategy.

Thirdly, the current study sought to address the lack of research on the barriers that are experienced by middle managers and how these are overcome in a government department. The study further depicted that there are many barriers with which the middle managers at the selected government department deal with on a daily basis. The barriers are the lack of understanding of government work, lack of monitoring and support, lack of skilled personnel, lack of skill development, lack of funding and lack of information. In addition, there are barriers that are related to inter-governmental relations, concurrent functions, working in silos, competing priorities and unrealistic timelines. These barriers may impede strategy implementation if they are not dealt with urgently on a daily basis by the middle managers. In overcoming the barriers, the middle managers made use of enablers of strategy, namely creative coping mechanisms, building partnerships, engaging people, networking, communication and access to resources. The partnerships and engaging people allowed the middle managers to converse with officials on how to overcome the barriers to strategy implementation that they encounter. The creative coping mechanisms involved the middle manager employing their leadership skills, acquiring proper skills, being innovative and creative in dealing with barriers of strategy. Furthermore, the access to resources such as funding and information are used to overcome barriers to strategy implementation.

The middle managers reiterated that it is advisable to make changes to current practices of the crafting and implementation of the strategy. The enablers that are used to prevent barriers to strategy implementation can be further strengthened which involve changes to availability of resources, effective interpersonal relationships, communication and information. The changes to the current practices could improve strategy implementation across government. Sections should not work in silos and this can be improved through effective interpersonal relationships. Lastly, this research established that strategy and strategising are human actions, and what middle managers do in relation to the strategies may affect the outcome of service delivery in government.



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## APPENDIX: A - THE RESEARCH INTERVIEW GUIDE

The interview under consideration will be in the form of a semi-structured interview. The interview guide consists of two sections. The first section consists of questions aimed at building rapport and also consists of some demographic questions. The second section consists of questions that will assist in answering the research questions.

### Section 1 : Demography and establishing rapport

- These questions would be used to build rapport, and to identify the level of experience and ascertain the length of time the middle manager has been in this position
  - **Tell me about yourself, your experience and background?**
  - **Tell me about your job and how you came to be in the position of middle manager?**
  - **How many people report to you?**

### Section 2 : Exploring how middle managers implement deliberate strategy in a government department?

The empirical objective is

- How do middle managers implement strategy in a government department in South Africa?

Specific objectives	Questions
The questions here aim to explore the role that the middle manager (practitioner) plays in strategy process and how the strategy is crafted (deliberate versus emergent strategy)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Describe in your own words what you understand by the term “strategy”?</b></li><li>• <b>Tell me more on how strategy is crafted in your organization?</b></li><li>• <b>Please give some examples that stand out in terms of how you participated in the strategy process in your department?</b></li></ul>
The aim of these questions is to gauge how strategy is implemented or operationalised in the Education environment for the current electoral cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Tell me more on how strategy is implemented in the Education sector where you work?</b></li><li>• <b>Explain the activities and roles you are responsible for in implementing the strategies in your section?</b></li><li>• <b>What are the tools that you use with regard to strategy implementation?</b></li></ul>
The aim of these questions is to answer the research question of how middle managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>What are the main challenges with regards to strategy implementation?</b></li><li>• <b>What are the barriers you experience with regard to strategy implementation?</b></li><li>• <b>How do you overcome these barriers?</b></li></ul>

deal with challenges that arise	
The aim of this question is to gauge if the participant would change any activity in crafting and implementing strategy in a government environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Can you describe if you would change any activities involved with the crafting of the strategy and the implementation thereof?</b></li> </ul>

## **APPENDIX: B - ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE**

DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

12 September 2016

Dear Ms Junitha Surju,

**Decision: Ethics Approval**

Ref #: 2016\_CEMS\_BM\_051

Ms Junitha Surju

Student [REDACTED]

**Name:** Ms Junitha Surju – Principal Researcher (junithasurju@gmail.com; [REDACTED])

**Proposal:** A case study exploring how middle managers implement deliberate strategy in a government department.

**Supervisor:** Ms Nadine De Metz and Prof Annemarie Davis ([REDACTED])

**Qualification:** Postgraduate degree

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Department of Business Management Research Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Final approval is granted from 12 September 2016 to 11 September 2018.

**For full approval:** The application was reviewed in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics by the Department of Business Management on 12 September 2016.

The proposed research may now commence with the proviso that:

- 1) The researcher/s will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
- 2) Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study, as well as changes in the methodology, should be communicated in writing to the Department of Business Management Ethics Review Committee. An amended application could be requested if there are substantial changes from the existing proposal, especially if those changes affect any of the study-related risks for the research participants.
- 3) The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study.

Kind regards,



Prof Sharon Rudansky-Kloppers  
Chairperson of the sub-unit RERC  
Department of Business Management  
[REDACTED]



Prof Thomas Mogale  
Executive Dean  
College of Economic and Management Sciences





## **APPENDIX: C - PARTICIPANT INFORMATION**

### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

**A case study exploring how middle managers implement deliberate strategy in a government department.**

#### **Dear Prospective Participant**

My name is Junitha Surju and I am doing research under the supervision of Ms Nadine De Metz, a lecturer in the Department of Business Management, and Professor A Davis, an associate professor in the College of Economic and Management Sciences (CEMS). I have been accepted by the University of South Africa (UNISA) to pursue my studies in the Master of Commerce in Business Management (Full Dissertation). I successfully defended my research topic during November 2015, at a colloquium and I have been granted permission to proceed to the second year of my study. We are inviting you to participate in a study titled “A case study exploring how middle managers implement deliberate strategy in a government department.”

#### **WHAT IS THE AIM/PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?**

The aim of this proposed research is to investigate how strategies in the Education Department are implemented. The research is specifically looking at middle managers in a South African government department in the [REDACTED] province.

#### **WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?**

The research focuses on middle managers and how they implement strategy. This study would target middle managers (on levels 11 and 12) and exclude all other employees in the organization on the other levels and ranks. The number of middle managers that will be interviewed will be fifteen (N=15).

## **WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY / WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH INVOLVE?**

One-on-one interviews will be conducted with middle managers during their lunch break or after office hours. You will therefore be interviewed by myself using a semi-structured interview guide and the interviews will be recorded. The duration of interview would be 45 minutes.

## **CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY?**

Your participation is voluntary and information will be treated as confidential. You are also advised that you can opt not to answer questions or stop the interview at any time, during the interview. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. Participants can access information about the Unisa policy on Research Ethics at [www.unisa.ac.za/cmsys/staff/contents/departments/res\\_policies/docs/Policy%20on%20Research%20Ethics%20-%20rev%20appr%20-%20Council%20-%202020.06.2014.pdf](http://www.unisa.ac.za/cmsys/staff/contents/departments/res_policies/docs/Policy%20on%20Research%20Ethics%20-%20rev%20appr%20-%20Council%20-%202020.06.2014.pdf)

## **WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

The benefits of the proposed study are that an assessment would be made on how middle managers implement strategy in an Education department over one of the financial year of the current electoral cycle in South Africa. This is advantageous since Education takes the biggest slice in government budget and spending.

## **WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED INCONVENIENCE OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?**

Participation is voluntary and you may experience some uncertainty in answering some of the questions. There is no right or wrong answer. I also commit to ensure that you cannot be identified based on the answers given and how I report on it

## **WILL WHAT I SAY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?**

Your name would not be recorded anywhere and no one will be able to connect you to the answers. To protect identities, all participants will be assigned a pseudonym and the files will be kept under an alias file name. The assignment of the fictitious names would only be understood by the researcher. Further note that your anonymous data may be used for purposes for example research report and/or dissertation. Your privacy would be protected because personal identifiers will be removed from research-related information.

### **HOW WILL INFORMATION BE STORED AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED?**

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet. The electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. The paper based information would then be destroyed by being shredded and the computer based files and audio recordings will be deleted after five years.

### **WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?**

There will be no payment or reward offered for taking part in the research.

### **HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?**

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the College of Economic and Management Sciences, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

### **HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS?**

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Ms J Surju on 012 [REDACTED]

If you have any questions or comments regarding the study please contact my supervisors, Mrs. N De Metz on [REDACTED] ([dmetzn@unisa.ac.za](mailto:dmetzn@unisa.ac.za)) or Professor A Davis [REDACTED] ([davisa@unisa.ac.za](mailto:davisa@unisa.ac.za)).

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.

Ms J Surju

## **APPENDIX: D - INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

### **CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a research report and/or dissertation.

I agree to the recording of the interview using an digital voice recorder.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Full Name of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Full Name of Witness: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Witness: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX: E - APPROVAL FROM GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT**

[REDACTED]

Ms J Surju

[REDACTED]

By email: [REDACTED]

Dear Ms Surju

**APPLICATION TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH TO INTERVIEW MIDDLE MANAGERS AT [REDACTED]**

On 13 March 2015 the [REDACTED] received your request to conduct research to interview middle managers at the department.

The research request is approved on condition that you as the applicant of the research adhere to the conditions set in the research protocol document titled, "Guidelines for researchers in conducting research in the department" (Annexure A).

Please refer future engagements including further letters required based on this approval, to the Research Coordination Monitoring and Evaluation (RCME). Please also ensure that the draft questionnaire for the research is consulted with the RCME unit as they will process consultation with the relevant unit in Branch A prior to approval to conduct the questionnaire.

We request that you share the findings of the research with the [REDACTED] at the conclusion of your research.

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]